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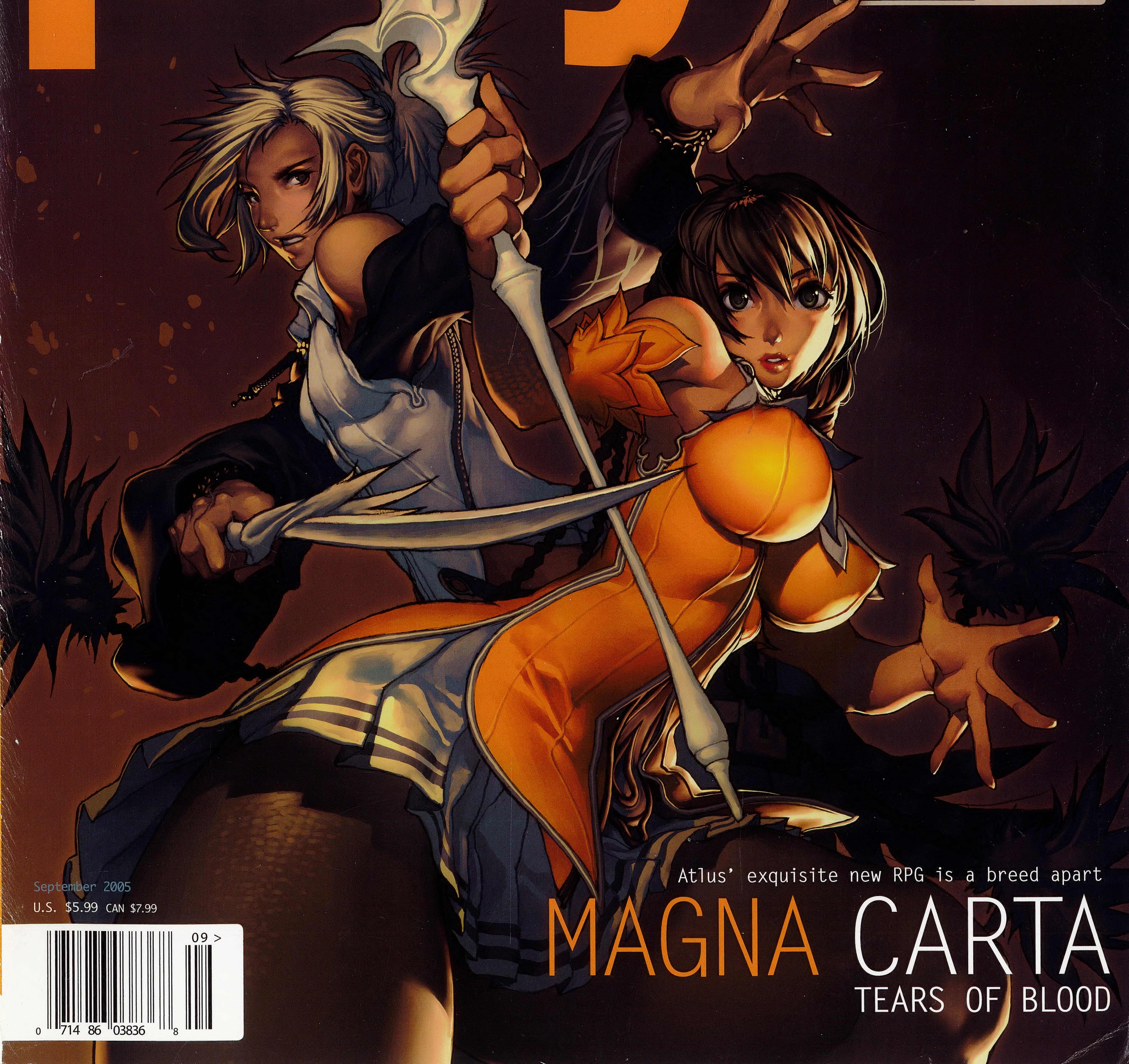

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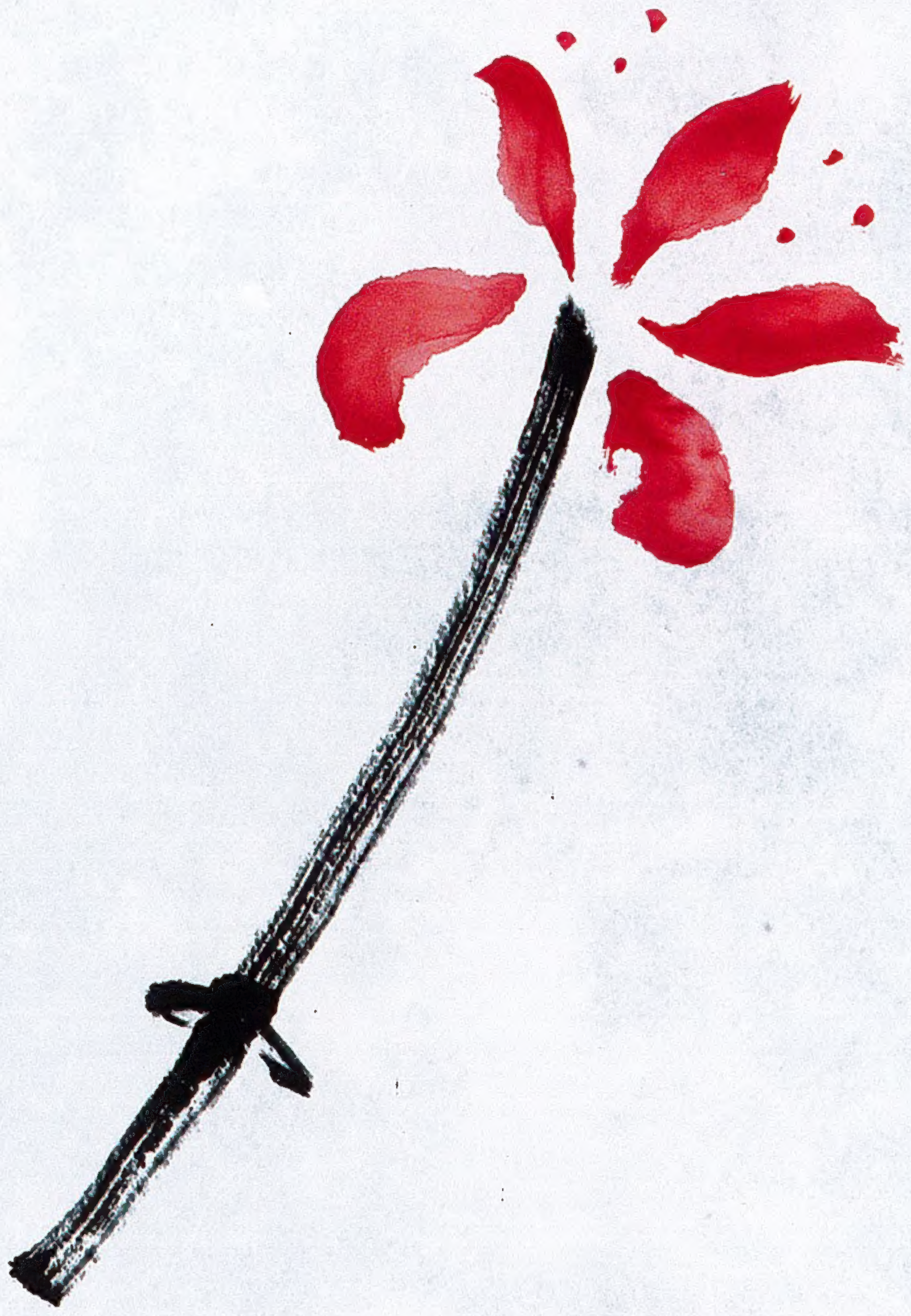

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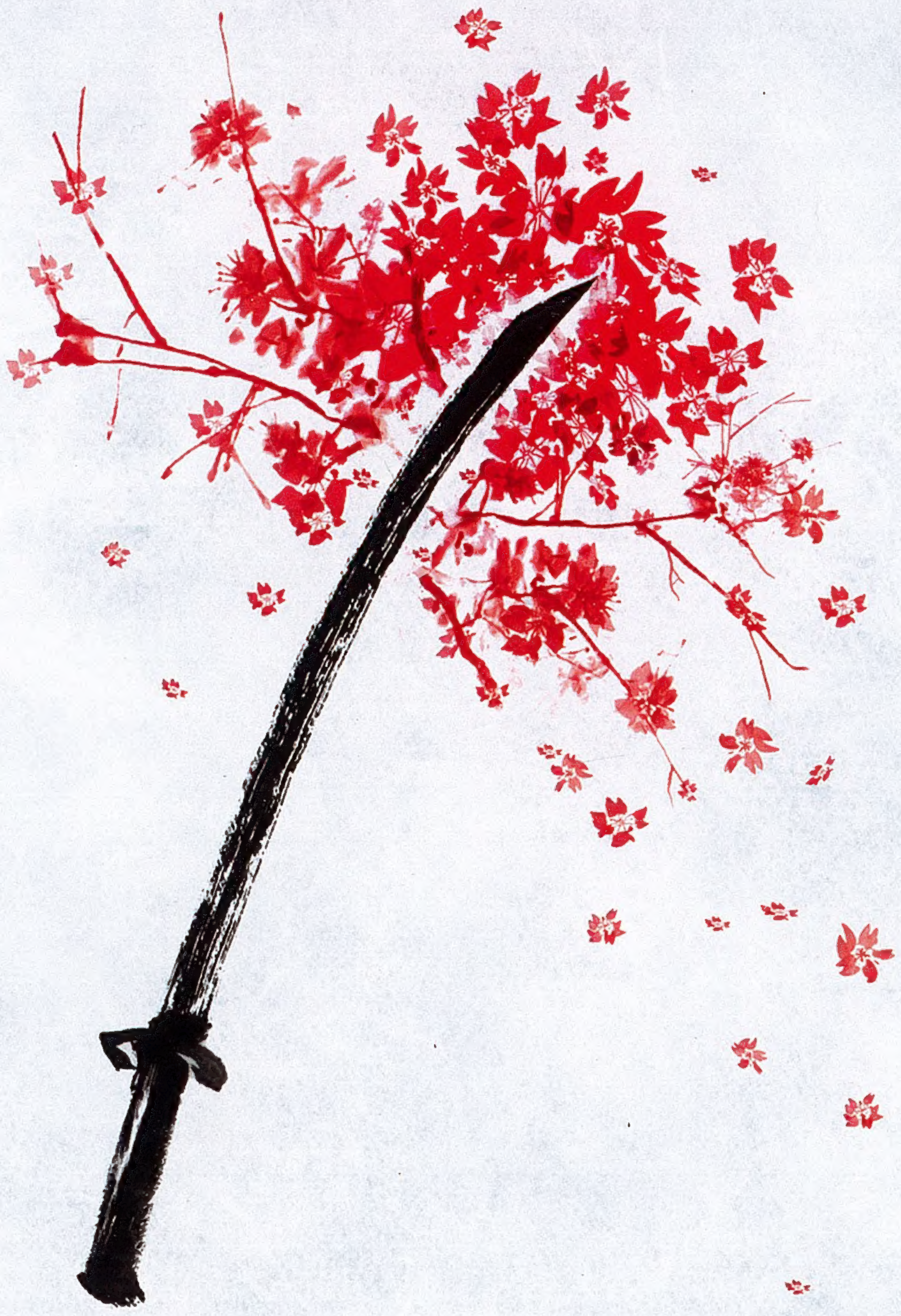

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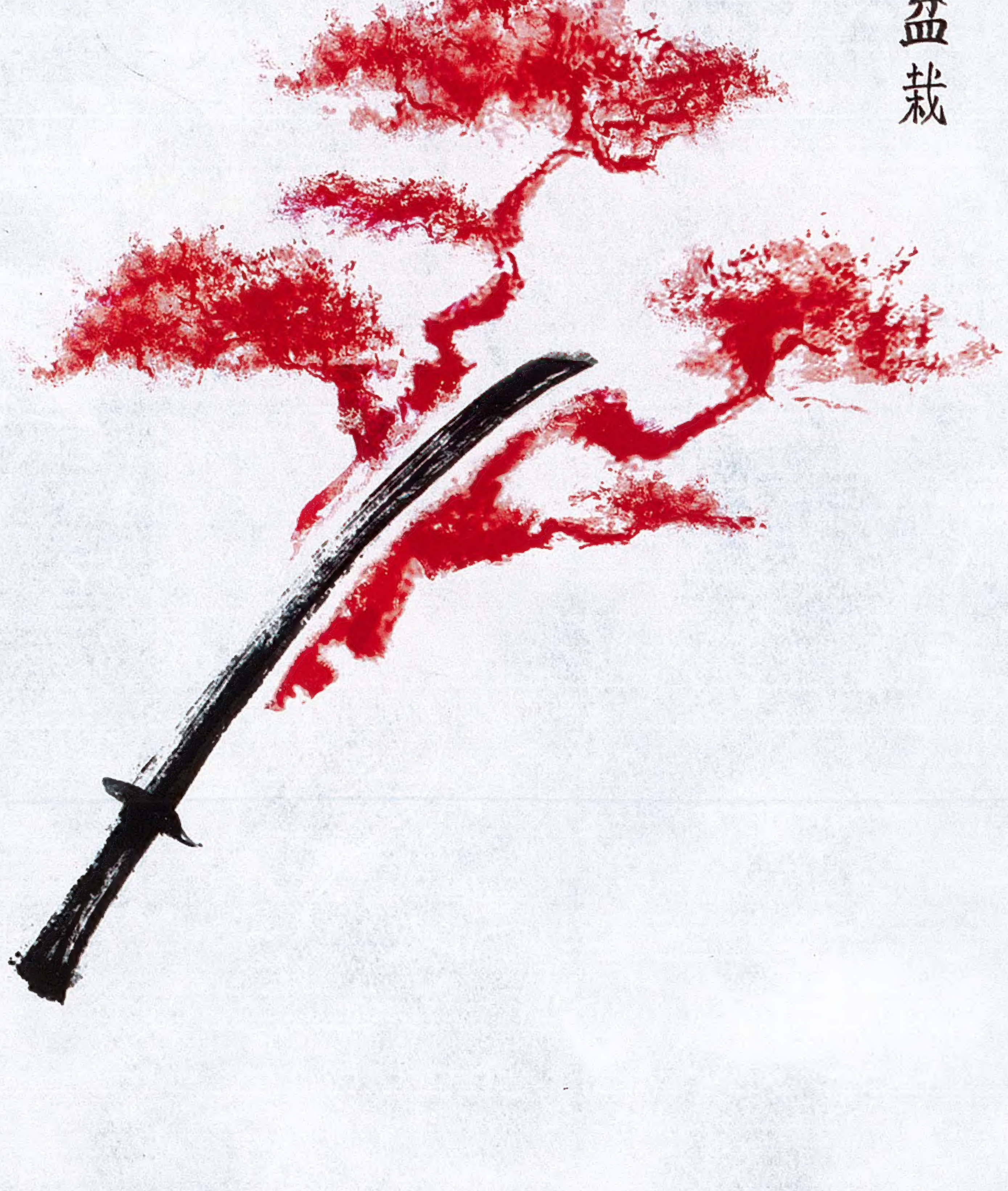

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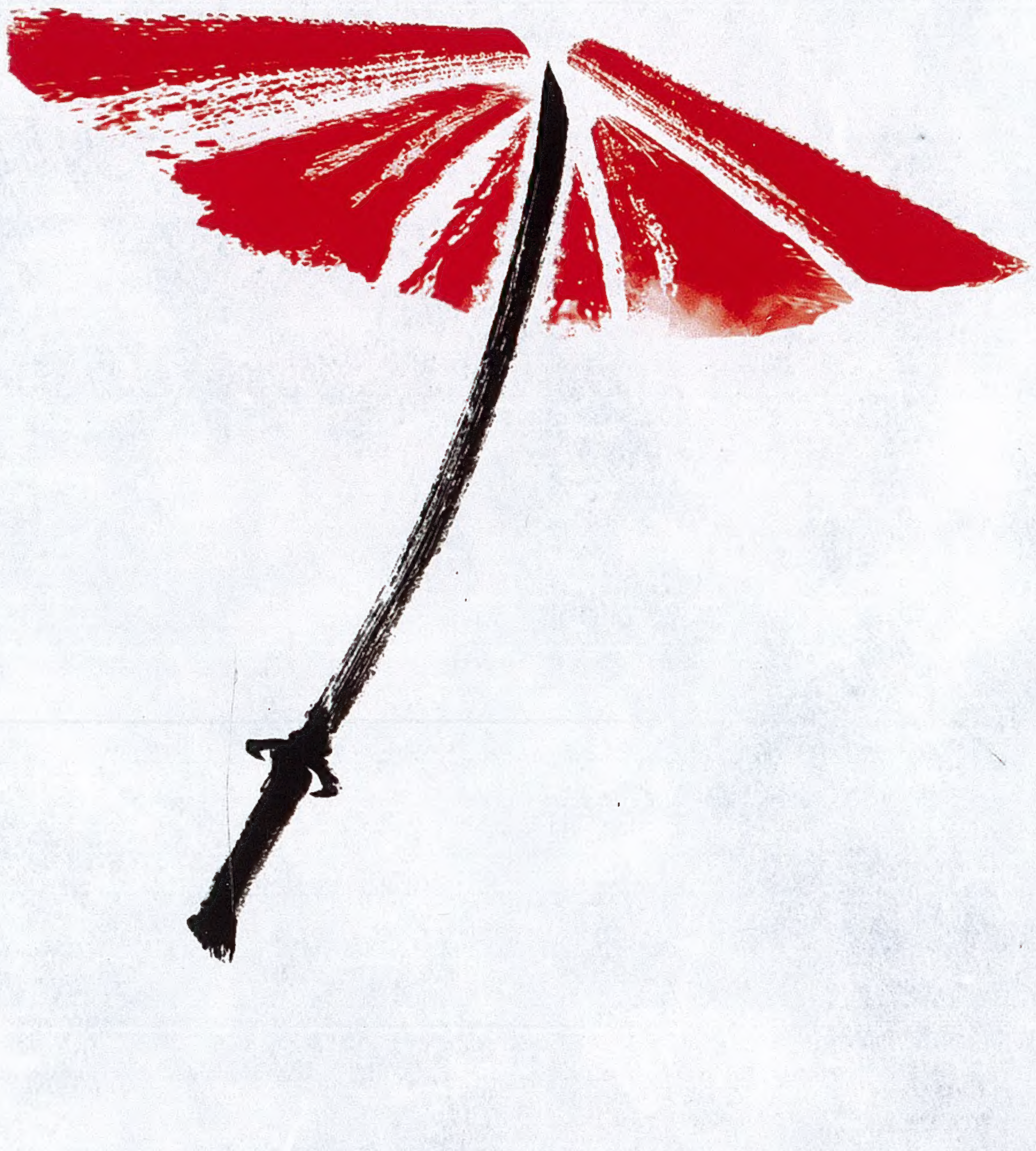

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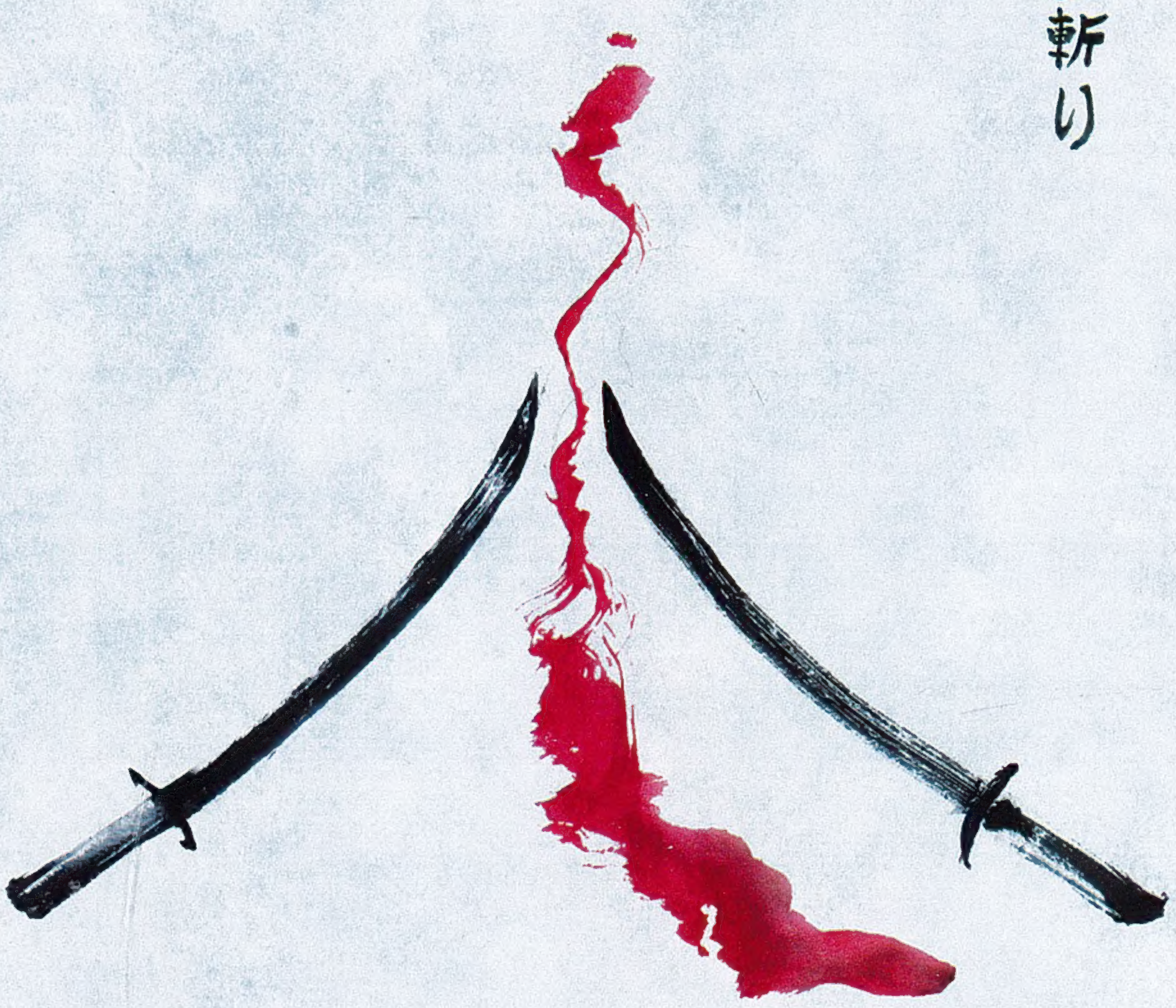

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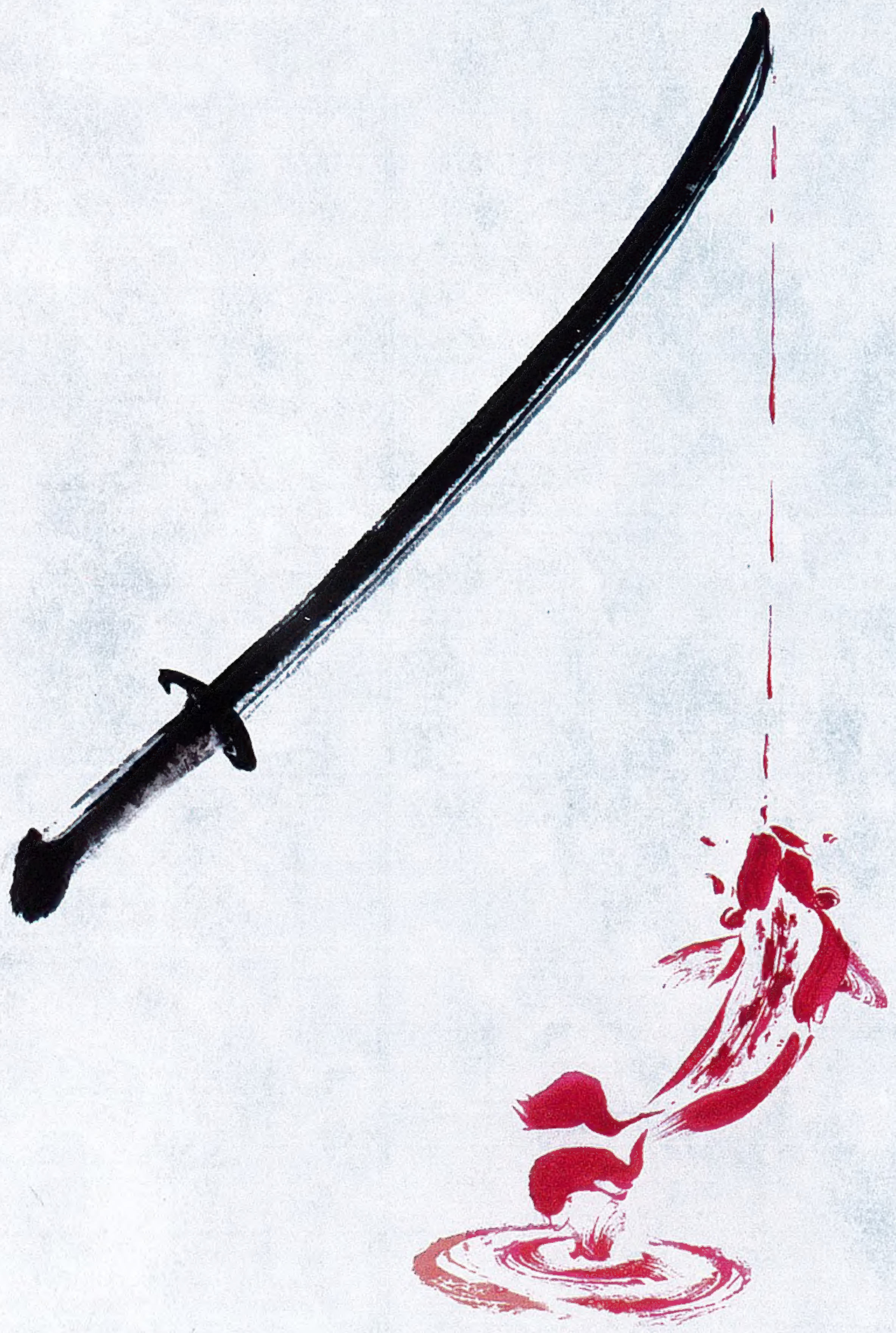

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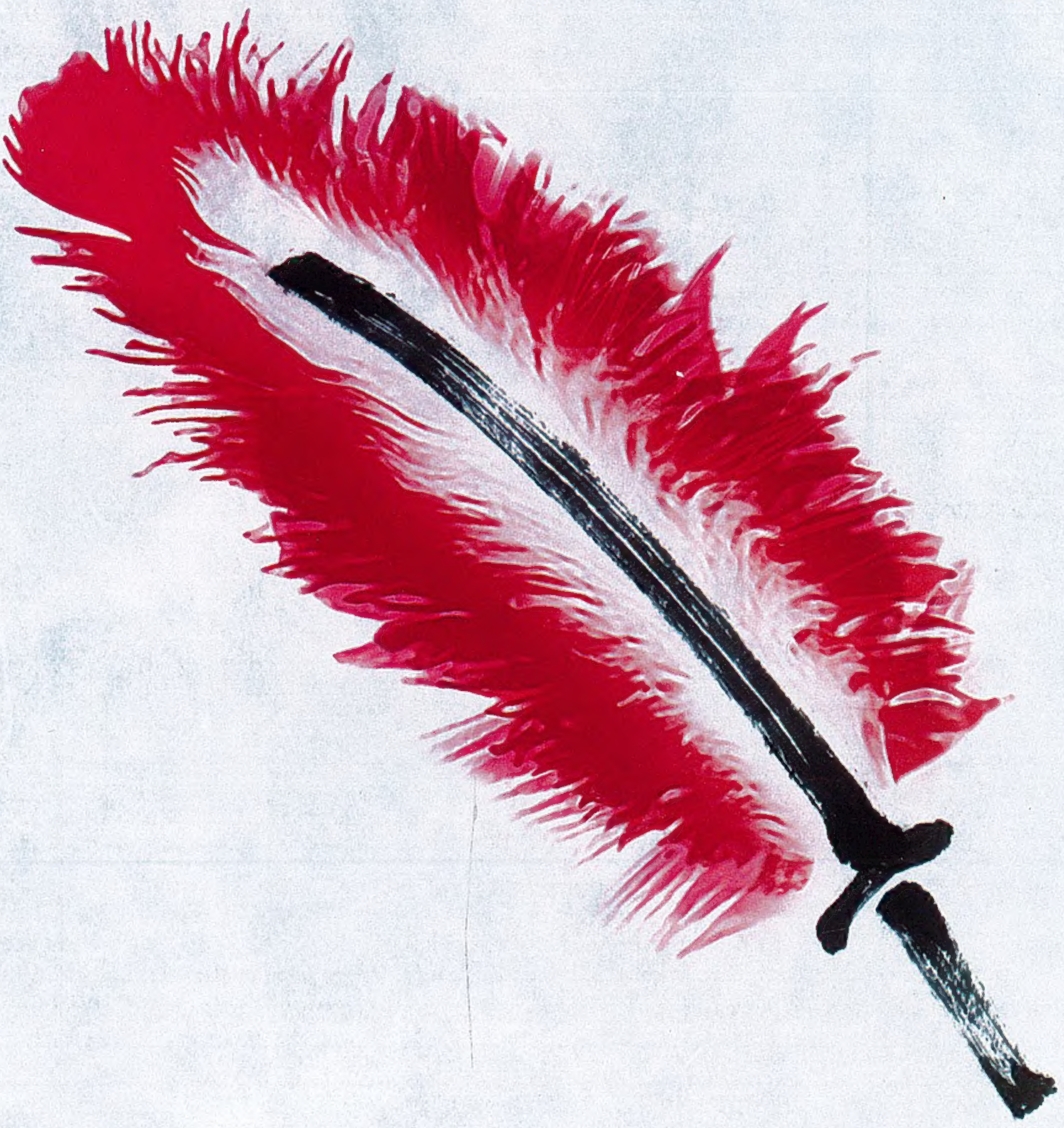

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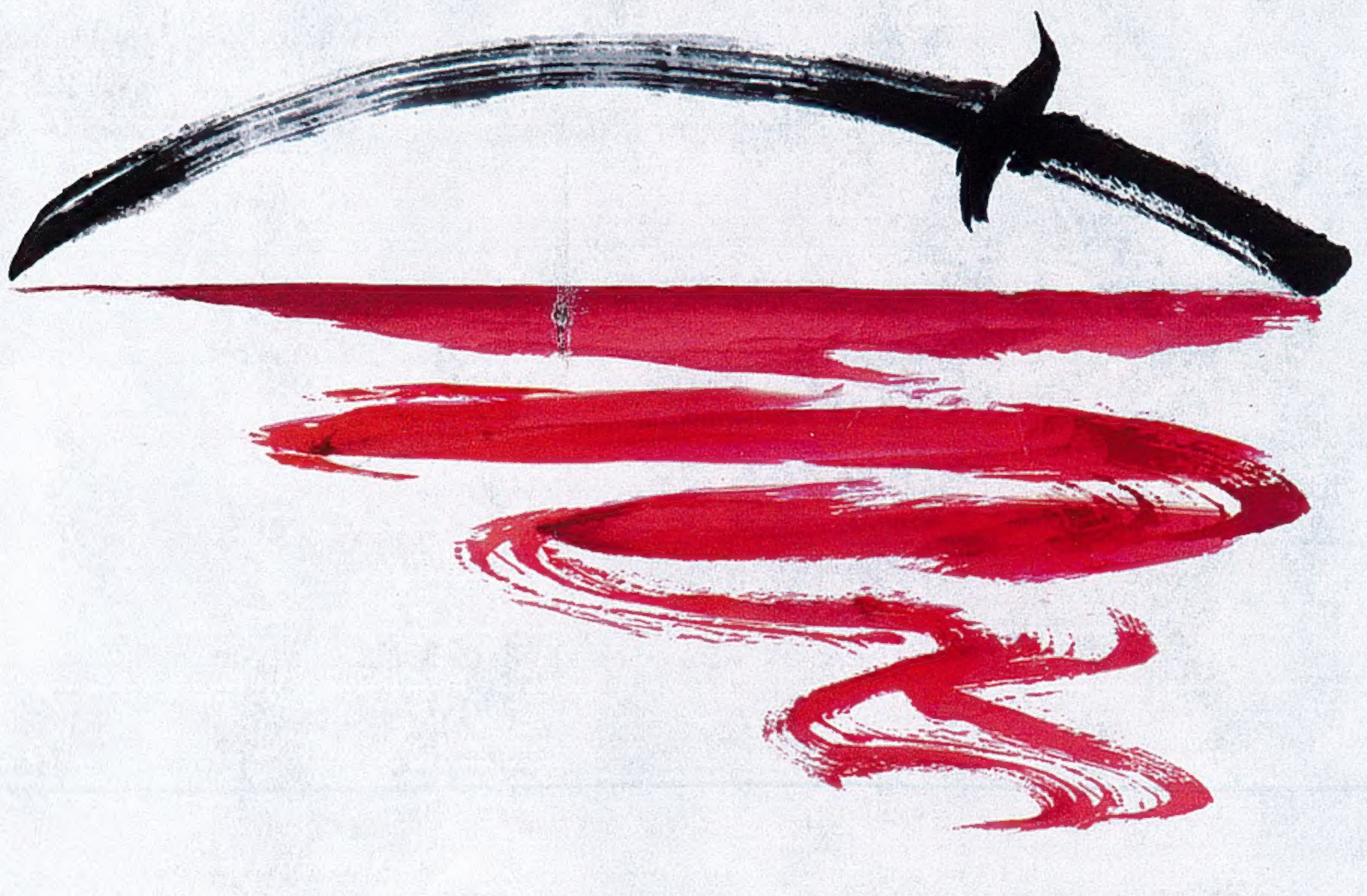

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September 2005 Volume 4 Issue 9

Letter from the Editor

Mmm, Hot Coffee

Because I would be amiss not to (I was going to speak to the bizarre state of current NPD/TRSTS sales trends), I must chime in on the recent uproar over the latest controversial oral mishap in these United States. Last time I checked, sex was how we all got here, yet apparently in the U.S., it's a worse offense than murder… Wait, let me rephrase that… Sex in movies and on TV is okay, illicit disgusting sex on the internet is cool, but sex in video games is worse than murder—you know, that other thing you do in San Andreas. What kind of a message is this sending our kids… "Would you youngsters please get back to killing minorities and car jacking and get your minds off of this sex business!?"

Fact is, I, along with most of the Americans I know, can think of few things better than sex. I mean, isn't sex really what we strive for in life? It alone occupies 90 percent of our brain power throughout junior high and high school, then afterwards, as we get older, we eat right and get plastic surgery to look great to get more…and now we even have Viagra, so we can die having sex. So why on Earth is Hilary Clinton—who, let's face it, is the last person who should be speaking on illicit oral—so up in arms about an M-rated game portraying a tame sex scene buried so deep within the code that the only reason anyone would go through the trouble to see it is to see what she's so freaked out about. I mean, let's face it, live sex is normally but a few clicks away in the vast majority of households in America. Let her worry about her daughter and the rest of us worry about our own kids. If anything, we need political scrutiny over internet porn and their incessant pop-ups where actual disturbing unnatural acts are way too easy for kids to access. I'm quite sure that Hot Coffee isn't going to drive any youths off the deep end…especially ones playing San Andreas, where you can kill police officers and run over innocent pedestrians. Apparently our politicians and retailers are so out of step that they actually believe sex to be the big concern here in the country where it's easier to buy a gun than a copy of GTA. Those same retailers were fine peddling violence…but sex…no…that just won't do. I hope Rockstar remembers this when they release their next million-seller. I'm sure there are plenty of other retailers who will happily fill the gap.

Look, if I had it my way, as I've said before, I wish we didn't have any games like GTA. I'd much rather see that same structure put to a fantasy or cartoon model (The Simpsons: Hit & Run; now that was cool—puts any GTA game to shame if you ask me), but that doesn't give me the right to stop anybody of the appropriate age from having their fill of it. As is always the case, the responsibility falls to the parents, plain and simple. We've got a war to fight and are living in a vastly changed world in dire need of leadership that's more concerned with our place in the world and safety than whether or not gamers are getting off on ugly polygonal implied sex. For that matter, God of War and Darkwatch have far more graphic sex that is finally breaking down taboos. Let's not let a few uptight opportunists screw it up for the rest of us.

We were born with reproductive organs, not armaments. So why can no one even utter outlawing guns while sex is held up as the great evil? If Hilary really wants my vote, let her take that one on. Not far from where I live, from where a lot of us live, innocent kids are gunned down every day, so, what, people can hunt? Give 'em muskets. That, Mrs. Clinton, is a cause worth fighting for. Please leave us alone. And the next time you decide to bark about gaming, do some research. Nancy Drew was your example? Nancy Drew? And you want to be President? It's 2005…get with the program.

Dave Halverson Editor In Chief

play magazine staff

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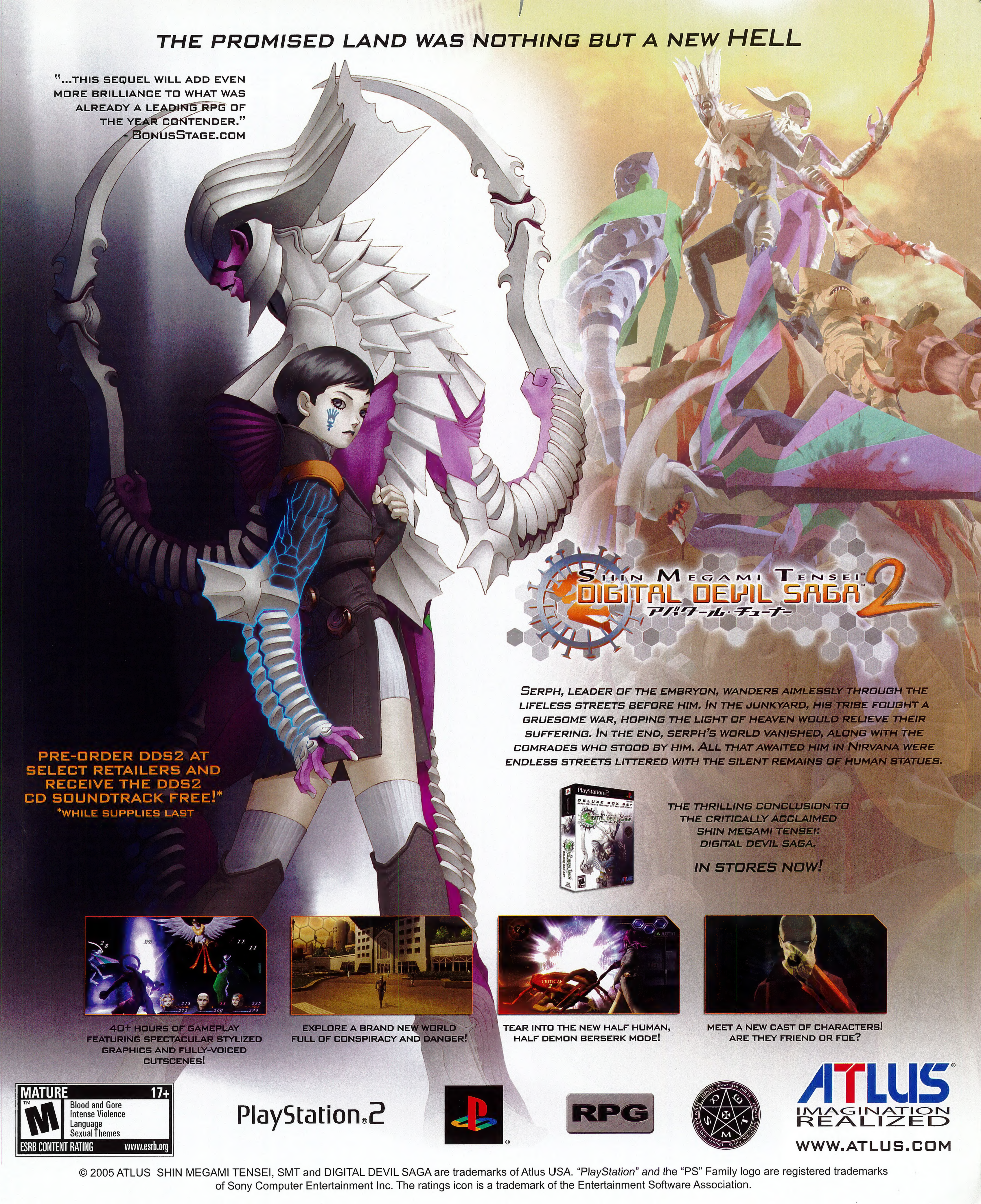

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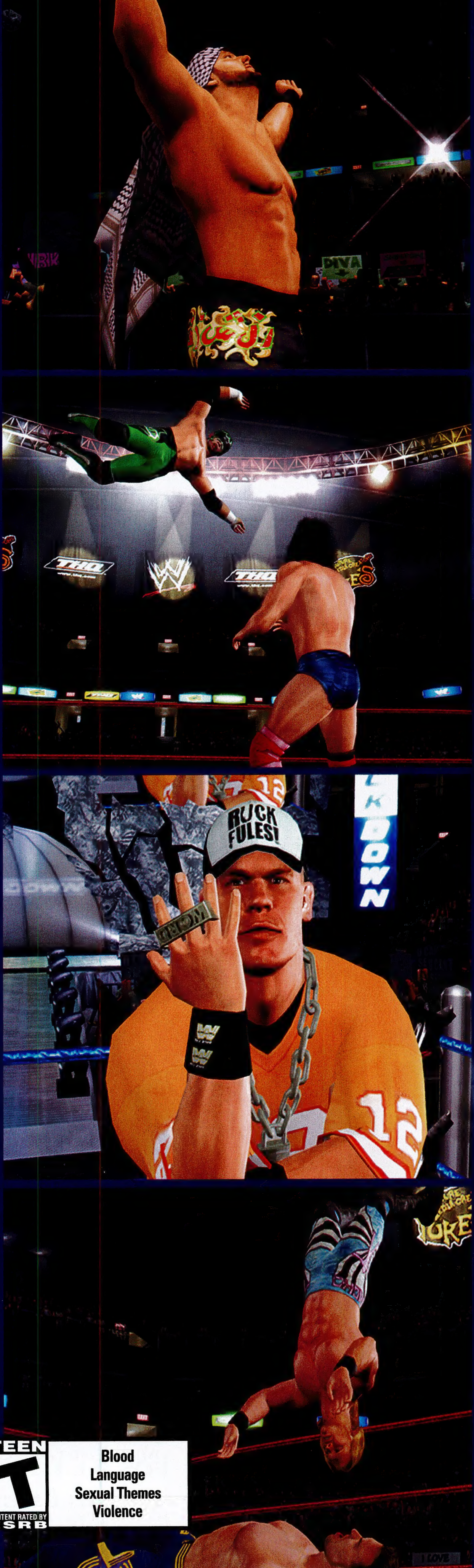

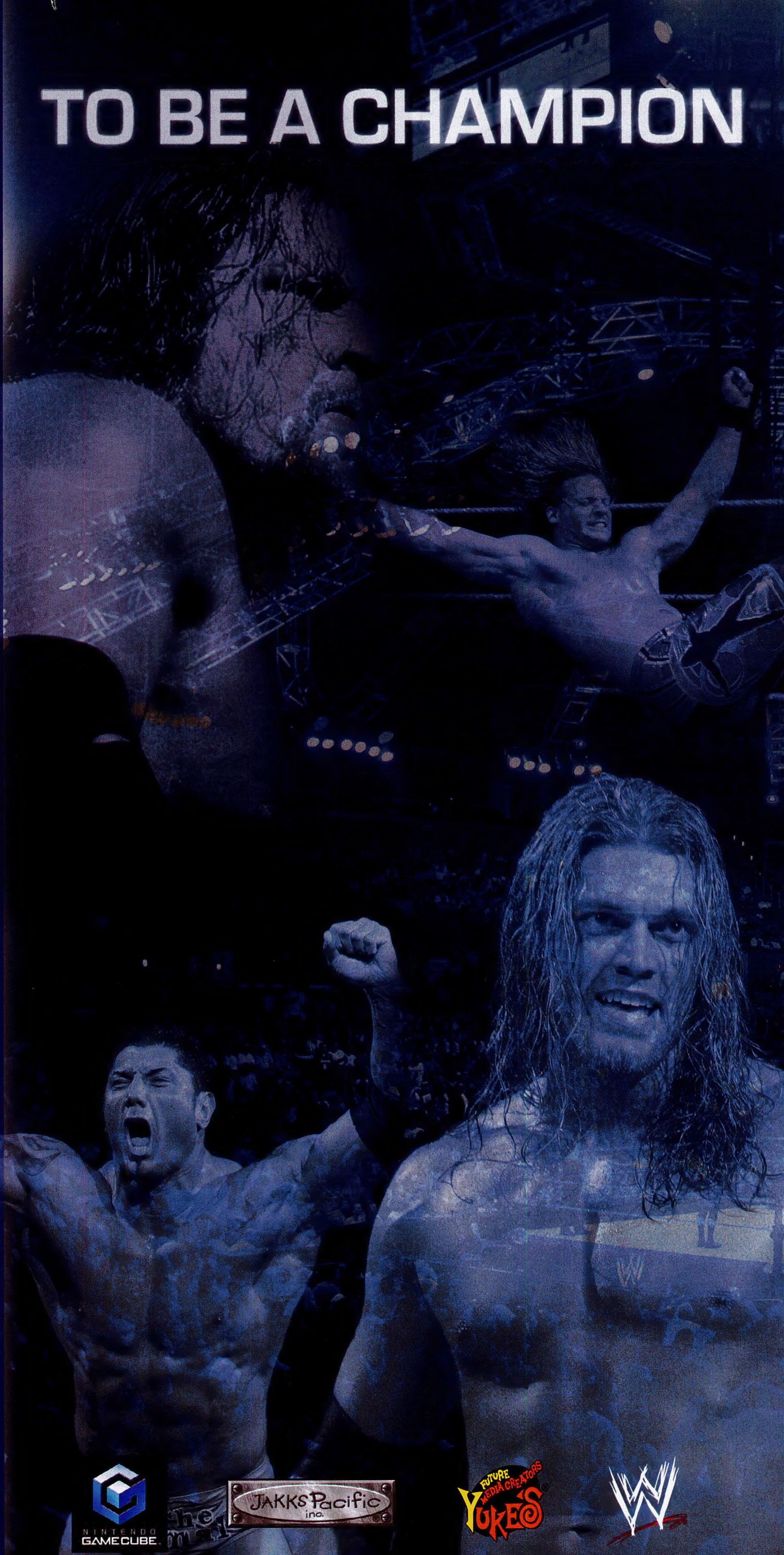

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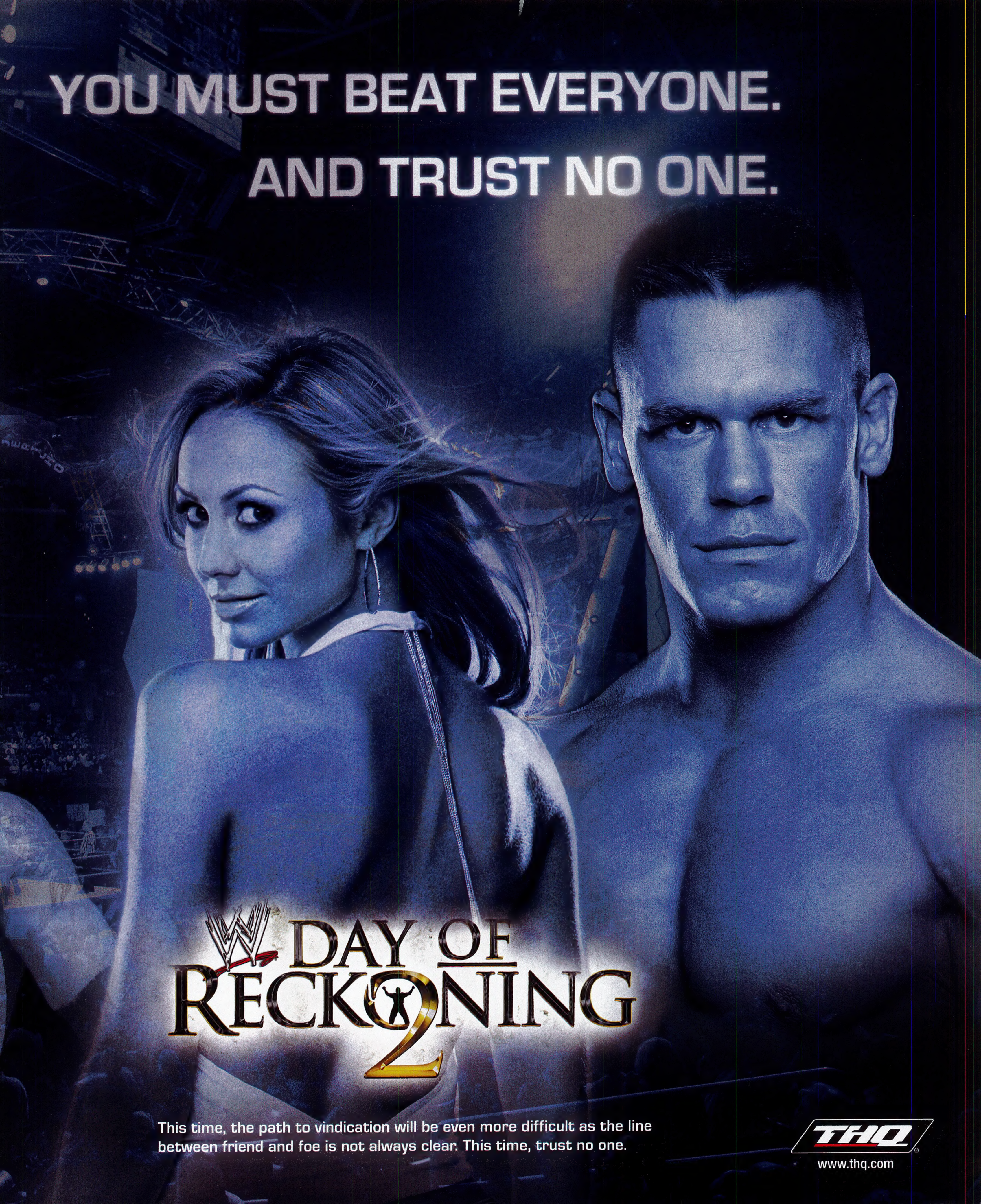
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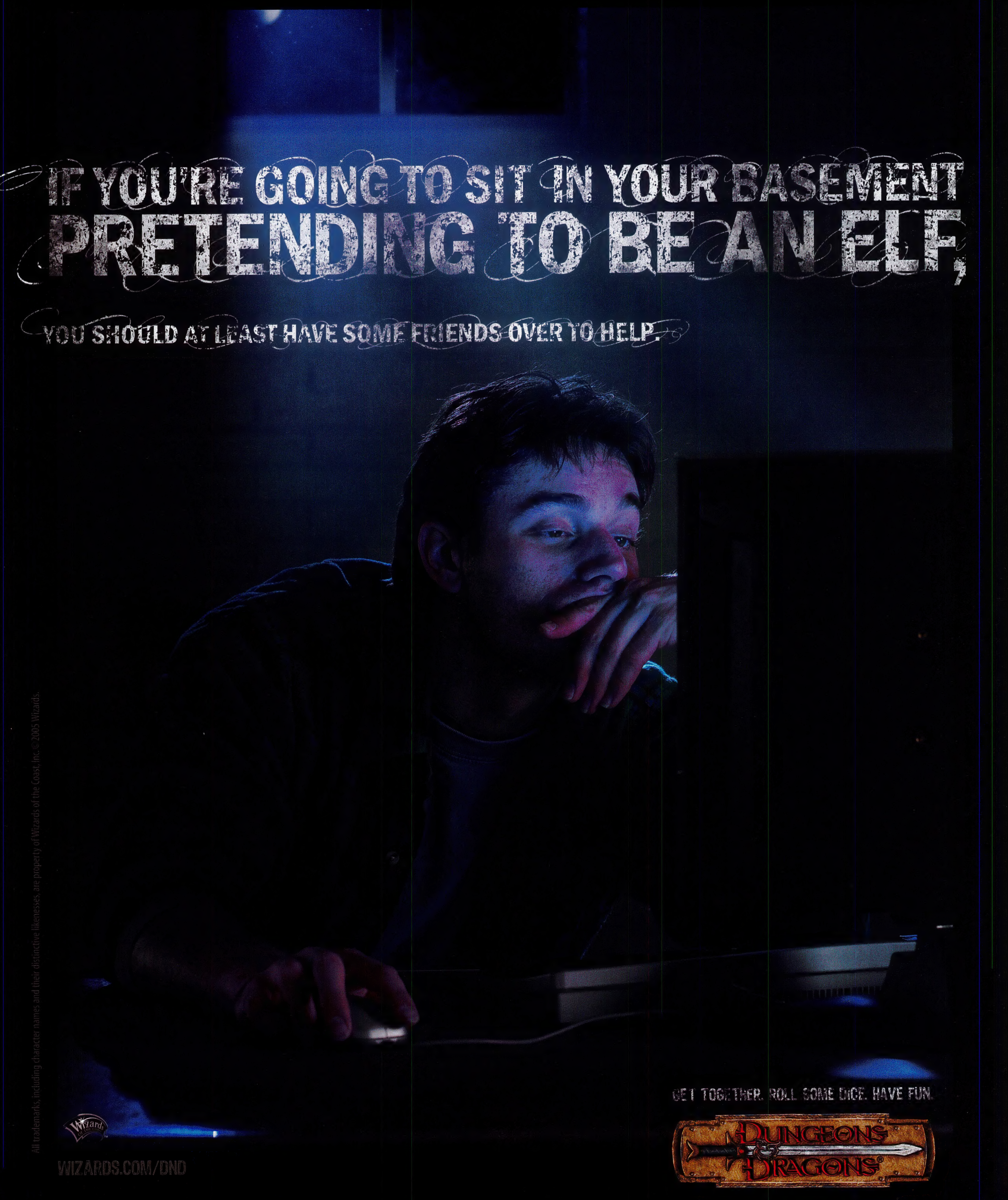
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playback

September 2005

letters@playmagzine.com

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Dirty dealer deeds

Batman Begins, Catwoman, Constantine, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, The Incredibles, Fantastic Four, The Punisher, The Incredible Hulk, A Series of Unfortunate Events, Harry Potter 1, 2, 3. What am I naming here? Movies? No, actually these are all video games that come out conveniently at the same time as the movies do. The "quality" of these games is judged by how closely the in-game characters resemble the actual actors. So when hopeful little Katya wanders off to Family Video or Hollywood to rent Psychonauts or some other original game, she is faced with five copies of Batman Begins instead. No, these places do not even carry half of the video games on the market and, surprise, surprise, the half they do not carry just happens to be the creative original half. So thank you, Play, for covering all the interesting games which I then want to play but cannot find!

Katya

It's so wrong too. This is part of the reason the NPD/TRSTS numbers are so backwards. Larger retailers too have begun cutting back on original content to make way for oft-times mediocre mainstream games. Best to stick to the chains like EB and Gamestop until things even up.

Lament of editorial

Howdy. I've been a fan of your mag for a little while now, starting with the first Girls of Gaming volume. I totally dig the distinctiveness of Play. It really has a very strong visual design element that helps it stand out. I sometimes find the content, editorially speaking, to be lesser than the excellent page layout. There always seems to be one or two spots in every issue where personal preference colors the information being reported on a little *too* much. Obviously this is fine for the opening editor's page, but when it feels like a third of a review is the reviewer lamenting on how such-and-such game doesn't live up to the virtues found in insert-obscure-old-school-platformer-here, it feels a bit excessive. And while I agree with you 100 percent on the hip-hopification of certain games (I come from the NES generation), going on and on about it gives an impression of being somewhat conservative, out of touch, and stick-in-the-mud-ish.

On the subject of reviews, what exactly merits Conker: L&R game of the month when both Killer 7 and Guild Wars earned the same score? Wouldn't a three-way tie have been more democratic, since they were all judged to be of equal excellence? At least give your reasons for singling it out.

One last thing. I'd like to see and hear more of Associate Editor "Veela" Esqueda. She's a hottie and a half, and I'd like to know if she *really* knows her shit, or is [just] the token Hot Girl gamer on the review staff...

Adam

Adam, that's a tough one. Since all of those games are still available and there are a lot of new users out there, we feel that comparison—and especially personal preference—is an important part of the process. Lamenting is a good thing. Just as you might tell a 13-year-old watching a steady diet of CG about the virtues of old-school cel animation. Since we often talk about the differences between the old and the new in our everyday lives, it's bound to sink into a few reviews, especially where it's topical. On Conker, we break ties by taking a vote. Someone has to win. As for Ashley, well, we wouldn't hire just another pretty face. She is the real deal, and you will be reading a lot more of her starting with this very issue. In fact, she sounds off in this month's "Back of the Book."

> **"So when hopeful little Katya wanders off to Family Video or Hollywood to rent Psychonauts or some other original game, she is faced with five copies of Batman Begins instead."**

At ease, soldier

While serving overseas, we tend to get our magazines a bit late, basically when everyone else is getting the August issue in July, we are only just receiving the July issue. I am one of those people who reads a lot of magazines and I always buy Play magazine over others like GamePro and EGM. This month I feel a bit cheated. I bought the magazine hoping to get a good review of the other two systems which are going to market in the upcoming months, but all I received was a couple of pages with someone's biased opinion about how Sony is going to beat the competition, but raw horsepower does not define a game system, it is the games and the companies who choose to support each system with their wares.

In the industry I see a lot of favoritism, and it is mostly directed towards Sony and their system. All the systems share mostly the same developers, but for every one game that shows up on either an XBox or a GameCube, four games from that same company show for the PlayStation. Does this make the PlayStation the better system power-wise? No, it's just the system that is the developers' choice to create games for. Either that or they got bribed into doing so.

In my opinion, Sony only does so well because of the sheer number of games that are put out for its system each year compared to the others. If Microsoft or Nintendo had as many B-list games hyped as much as the many Sony B-list games, they would sell that many systems also.

I don't know much about what it takes to make games for each system, but I do know that when companies pick favorites they create a sad state of affairs for all gamers.

Kevin Phillips SSgt USAF

There's a first. We're usually accused of leaning in Microsoft or Nintendo's direction (a Sony game has never been awarded our Game of the Year). You sure it was Play? In the issue we cover the PS3, I think we all pledged our allegiance to the Revolution, and the issue before that, we did 16 pages on the Xbox 360 launch. You see more PS2 reviews because, for whatever reason, Sony has a lot more games out there, and so it makes sense for the publishers to get behind the system they have the best chance of scoring a hit on. That and Sony has a larger first-party arsenal and more system exclusives. They're a savvy bunch. But Nintendo and Microsoft are on the move as well. It's all good, KP; you just stay safe! That's one helluva shooter you're playing for America.

Two-page review

I just finished reading up to page 10 of my first issue of Play (well, I at least read the two pages that weren't ads), and so far I am very happy with my purchase. The editor complains that E3 sucks, and even though I was one of the people who didn't belong there, I have to agree with him. It was too much of a spectacle with too little substance, and booth babes are not only stupid but mildly offensive (I got one of those sweet anti-booth babe shirts). If I hadn't had the trip paid for by work and gotten in for free, I would be pretty annoyed. I doubt I'll go through the effort of going next year.

All of the letters you printed were intelligent, and I'm very impressed at your responses. After reading three competing magazines a day ago, I can assure you that you are nearly alone in noticing the problems in the industry. You printed a letter that was worried a game would have too much action in it. That is awesome. (I bet Ashley would agree on my theory that Resident Evil was better than Resident Evil 2 for nearly the same reasons.) And your reply to the letter about four-letter words was respectful. That is perhaps the most shocking; most other magazines would just attack the concerned fan with some caustic sarcasm. It may be too early to have an opinion on the language you use, but generally cursing for real emphasis is fine with me, but cursing to say phrases like "it's the shit" is kind of silly.

I can only hope the rest of your magazine is as good as the first two pages.

Jason S.

One would hope. Let us know...

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THE PLAN IN JAPAN

Xbox 360 prepares its overseas invasion

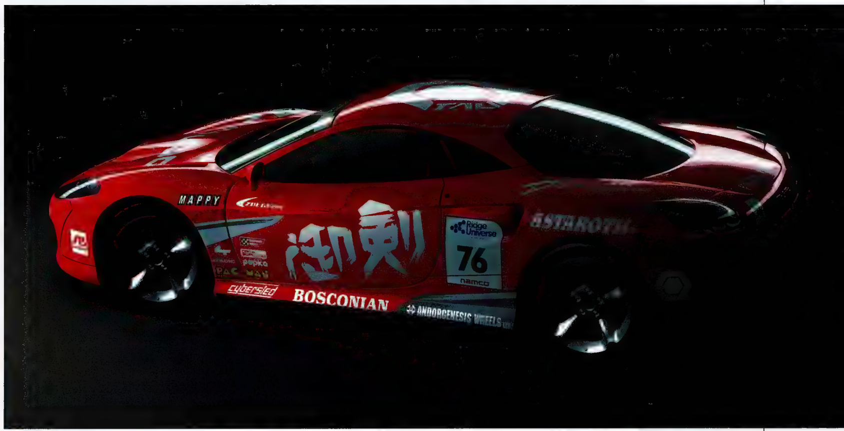
If you read our Xbox 360 feature story in the June issue of Play, then you already know that Microsoft has a new, global-minded philosophy in place and is planning to do everything they can to make their next console a success in Japan, as well as the rest of the world, via an increased number of Japanese partnerships and third-party affiliations. Microsoft reaffirmed that commitment with their Xbox Summit 2005, held late July in Tokyo. At the event, Microsoft announced a vast spectrum of games coming from publishers in Japan, including titles from renowned companies like Treasure and major series appearing on Microsoft hardware for the first time.

The list of titles announced at the Summit included, among others, Resident Evil 5 from Capcom; Project Gotham Racing 3 from Microsoft (yes, we know it's not Japanese); Ridge Racer 6, Frame City Killer, Love Football and an unnamed RPG title from Namco; a new Winning Eleven, Rumble Roses XX (working title) and Proyakyu Spirits from Konami; King of Fighters Maximum Impact 2 (working title) from SNK; Chromehounds (working title) from Sega; Far East of Eden Ziria – Tales from Distant Jipang from Hudson Soft; Wrestle Kingdom from Yuke's; a Mobile Suit Gundam game from Bandai; Versus Tactical Action (working title) from ARC System Works; a new Dynasty Warriors from Koei; and yet-to-be-revealed games from Treasure, Jaleco, cavia, Marvelous Interactive and Spike. Previously announced games like Microsoft's Ninety-Nine Nights and Tecmo's DOA Extreme Beach Volleyball 2, DOA4 and DOA: code Cronus were also featured.

"Japan is one of the most important video game markets in the world and is a key pillar of our global strategy for Xbox 360," stated Peter Moore, corporate vice president of worldwide marketing and publishing for Xbox at Microsoft, in a press release. "Our deep commitment to the Japanese market is evident in the exciting and unprecedented alliances we've forged with Japan's most talented and beloved game developers. Their new Xbox 360 titles will show the Japanese community and beyond that we are committed to defining the next generation of interactive entertainment."

Microsoft also reaffirmed plans to release the Xbox 360 in all three major markets—North America, Japan and Europe—in time for the 2005 holiday season.

> "Our deep commitment to the Japanese market is evident in the exciting and unprecedented alliances we've forged..."
>
> **Peter Moore** corporate vp of worldwide marketing and publishing for Xbox



These vehicle renders from Ridge Racer 6 can be summed up in one word: beautiful.

Black or White?

Color choices and more coming to PSP

Sexy now comes in milky white. Along with this newly elegant exterior paint job, which hits Japan on September 15 with the typical matching value pack accessories for 24,800 yen, Sony's eventually planning to release a multitude of colors for the PSP in the coming months. Even better, the company's finally gearing up to support the web-browsing functionality of their fledgling handheld by releasing official software that will finally negate the need for the current homebrew modifications. Just recently, version 2.0 of the system software system was also released, which means no more emulating for all you naughty ingénues out there who have been enjoying portable hacking.

TOO HOT FOR CONGRESS

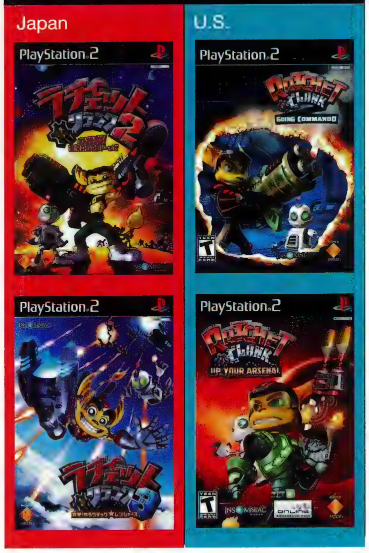
Hidden minigame gets GTA pulled from stores

The game industry was due for another scandal, and when the circus rolled into town for this one, Hilary Clinton joined other political performers like anti-game activist Jack "Sims 2 is porn" Thompson. Let's recap the events. The "Hot Coffee" mod went public shortly after the release of the PC version of the M-rated Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas. The mod allowed users to play a horribly drawn sex mini-game starring two consenting adult characters. Due to the game's popularity and the unbridled decadence of the internet, the San Andreas sex mod spread like wildfire. Take-Two staunchly repelled allegations of their involvement with the mod until the big bomb dropped: the sex mini-game was also unlocked in the PS2 version. With no way to modify the PS2 San Andreas and only an Action Replay or GameShark involved in the procedure, this sudden revelation—that the flagrant sexual content was built into the core game code—stirred the ESRB and congress into a frenzy. Clinton and others came down hard on the ratings system. ESRB president Patricia Vance backpedaled into damage control mode, successfully deflecting the blame to Rockstar and Take-Two who, ultimately, did not disclose the full extent of the game's content. In turn, Take-Two insisted that using third-party software to unlock the content was a violation of the game's end user license agreement; they claimed the "playable" content they submitted was indeed M-rated. In the end, Take-Two was ordered to remove all copies of the game from stores, re-sticker them with an Adults Only rating and chop the sexual content from future versions to regain their M rating. As we go to press, a class action lawsuit against Take-Two is beginning to gain momentum…

TURNING JAPANESE

Battle of the box art

For years, hardcore gamers have complained about how much better box art is in Japan than the U.S., but is that always the case? Pictured here are the domestic and Japanese packages from the Ratchet & Clank series. Did America get the better goods this time? Judge for yourself…and check out those eyebrows!



GET LOST ON XBOX

Fable follow-up is coming to console

When we named Microsoft's Fable as our 2004 Game of the Year, we hoped we'd get a sequel before long, but things have turned out better than we'd expected. Previously announced for PC, Fable: The Lost Chapters is coming to the original Xbox this fall, expanding upon the original with a slough of new content: new equipment and appearance modifiers, new spells, new weapons, new quests and, best of all, a whole new land to explore—the Dragon Continent. Given that this is something of a director's cut of the original, all the fantastic content and character interactions of the original Fable will be found here too. And to top it off, it will even be released at the Platinum Hits price point of $19.99. Looks like there's still some life in the original Xbox after all.

No more Sorrow for Romero

Famed designer departs from Midway

In mid-July, game designer John Romero, best known for games like Doom and Quake, revealed on his website (www.johnromero.com) that he had left his job as a developer for Midway. Details of his departure remain private, but according to both Romero and Midway, it won't have any negative impact on Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows, the project Romero had been helming for Midway's San Diego studio. What's next for Romero is unknown at this point—he stated that he's "looking at lots of exciting developments right now"—but he has been enjoying lots of Doom deathmatches during his free time. Meanwhile, Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows, the latest update to the classic fantasy franchise, ships for PS2 and Xbox this November.

Purchase any title featured below at your nearest Virgin Megastore or online at virginmega.com

database

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Virgin Megastore Top Ten

01	**Madden NFL '06** ea / ps2, xb, gc
02	**Delta Force: Black Hawk Down** novalogic / ps2, xb
03	**Nintendogs** nintendo / ds
04	**Darkwatch** capcom / ps2, xb
05	**Rainbow Six: Lockdown** ubisoft / ps2, xb, gc
06	**Burnout Revenge** ea / ps2, xb
07	**187 Ride or Die** ubisoft / xb
08	**NCAA Football 2006** ea / ps2, xb
09	**Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas** rockstar / xb, pc
10	**Incredible Hulk: Ult. Destruction** vu games / ps2, xb, gc

NPD/TRSTS Top Ten June Game Sales

01	**Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas** rockstar / xb
02	**Pokémon Emerald** nintendo / gba
03	**Star Wars Episode III** lucasarts / ps2
04	**Medal of Honor: European Assault** ea / ps2
05	**Conker: Live & Reloaded** microsoft / xb
06	**Lego Star Wars** eidos / ps2
07	**Madagascar** activision / ps2
08	**Madagascar** activision / gba
09	**Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition** rockstar / ps2
10	**Destroy All Humans!** thq / ps2

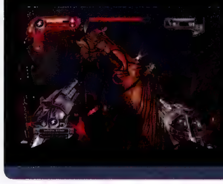
Your Megastore Beckons!

Madden NFL '06
ea / ps2, xb, gc

Better than last year's already-incredible football game? In a word: yes. The minor tweaks and cool new passing system seal the deal.

Delta Force: Black Hawk Down
novalogic / ps2, xb

Along with a realistic one-player military scenario based on true events, Black Hawk Down also has extensive multiplayer capabilities.



Darkwatch
capcom / ps2, xb

An FPS to die for. Only you decide which way Jericho ultimately turns... but either way, the house wins.

Top 5 Now Playing and Reader Selections

vote for your most wanted games! database@playmagazine.com

Readers' Most Wanted database@playmagazine.com

01	**Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess** nintendo / gc
02	**Final Fantasy XII** square enix / ps2
03	**Kingdom Hearts II** square enix / ps2
04	**Death, Jr.** konami / psp
05	**Shadow of the Colossus** sony / ps2

Dave Halverson editor in chief

01	**Shadow of the Colossus** sony / ps2
02	**Legend of Kay** capcom / ps2
03	**Magna Carta: Tears of Blood** atlus / ps2
04	**Killer 7** capcom / gc
05	**Death, Jr.** konami / psp

Brady Fiechter executive editor

01	**Genji: Dawn of the Samurai** sony / ps2
02	**The Suffering: Ties That Bind** midway / xb
03	**Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow** konami / ds
04	**Lumines** ubisoft / psp
05	**Madden NFL '06** ea / xb

Chris Hoffman some editor

01	**Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow** konami / ds
02	**Mega Man Zero 4** capcom / gba
03	**Sonic Gems Collection** sega / gc
04	**Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney** capcom / ds
05	**Vampire: Darkstalkers Collection** capcom / ps2

Michael Hobbs art director

01	**Killer 7** capcom / gc
02	**Nintendogs** nintendo / ds
03	**Meteos** nintendo / ds
04	**Kirby: Canvas Curse** nintendo / ds
05	**Pac'n Roll** nacmo / ds

Ashley Esqueda associate editor/internet director

01	**Resident Evil 4** capcom / gc
02	**Conker: Live & Reloaded** microsoft / xb
03	**Lumines** ubisoft / psp
04	**Death, Jr.** konami / psp
05	**Total Overdose** sci/eidos / xb

The next big thing in entertainment is surprisingly small.

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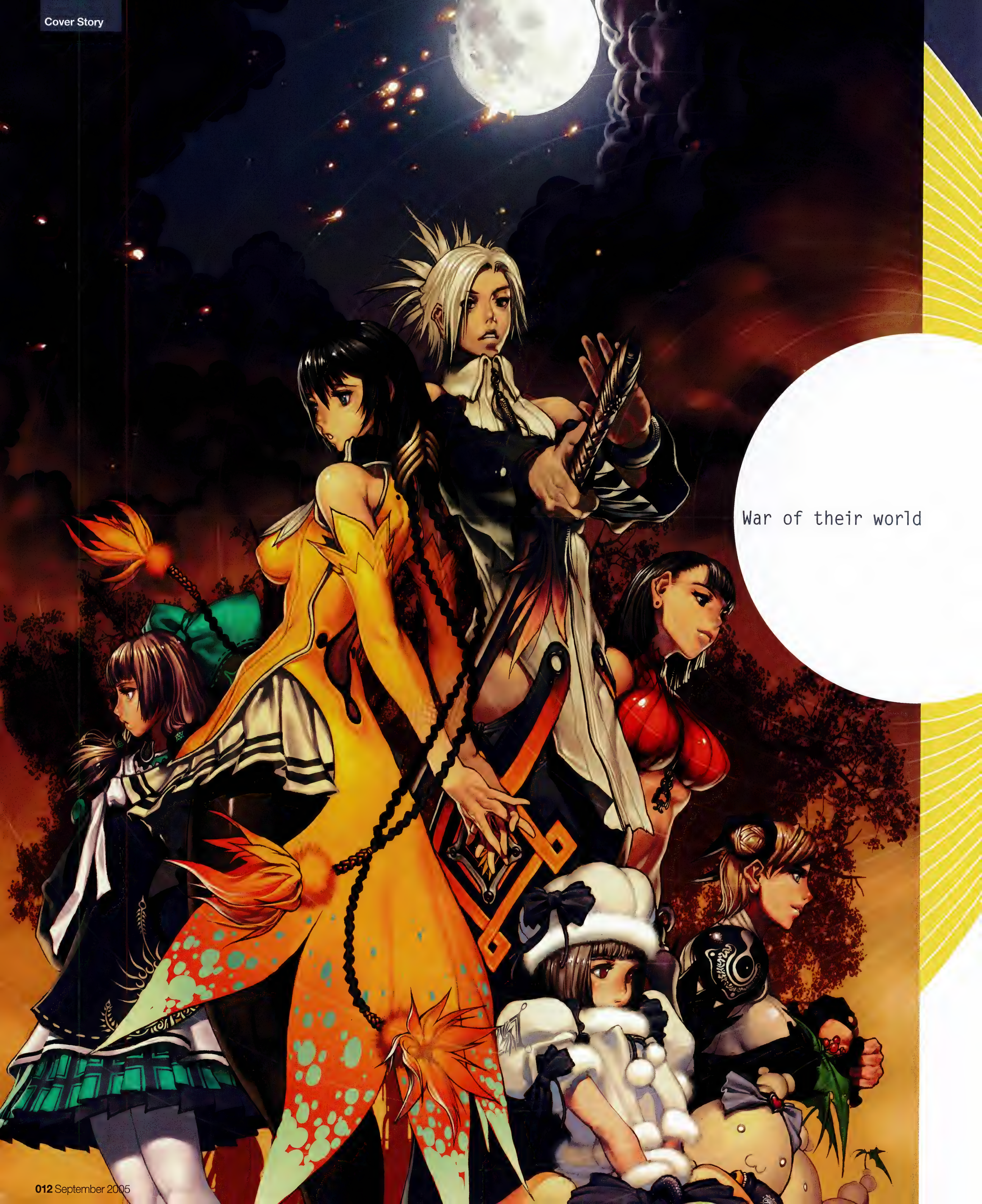


War of their world

MAGNA CARTA

TEARS OF BLOOD

words Dave Halverson

You don't see a lot of Korean RPG covers; in fact, welcome to the first. One reason being that until now there haven't been that many prominent Korean-developed games. Lineage and Lineage II and Kingdom Under Fire: The Crusaders and Heroes being the most prominent, the list is short but impressive…and also growing. WEBZEN is set to release two stunning MMOs in Huxley and SUN; Phantagram has more than a few tricks up its sleeve (including the long-awaited Strident) and SoftMax is just getting started. I was originally drawn to Magna Carta by Hyung-Tae Kim's stunning artwork, which I began downloading years ago, back when Magna Carta was a Korean PC project, but after a few hours with an early English PS2 version, provided by the skilled localizing team at Atlus, the path was clear: with FFXII nowhere in sight, Magna Carta represents not only the best of very few RPGs for the remainder of 2005, but another shining example of how far Korean game development has come.

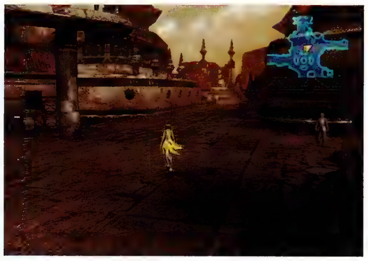
> "...Magna Carta avoids nearly every genre-endemic pratfall while playing host to a passel of systems all its own..."

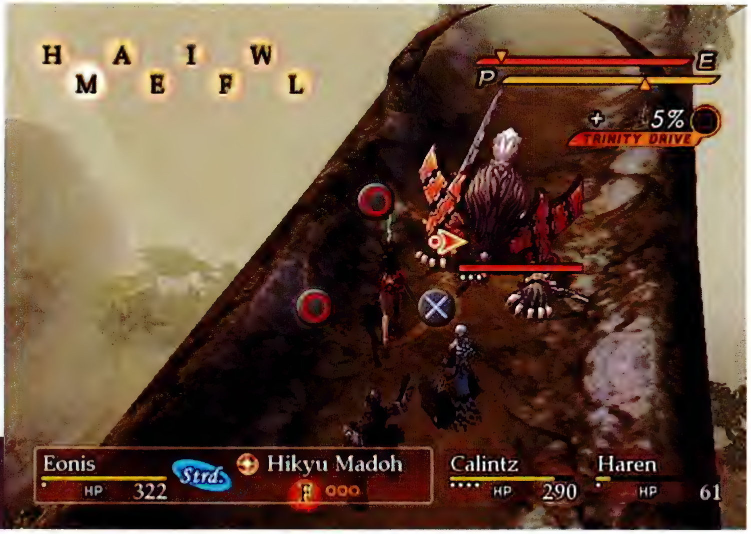
The story of Magna Carta is a simple one on the surface, with deeper ramifications as it pertains to the many characters you will meet on both sides of the skirmish, with who is good and who is evil often left to the eye of the beholder. It began when four sailing vessels filled with humans fled their war-torn continent seeking a better life, landing, after weeks at sea, on Efferia, native home to the Yason. At first, the Yason tolerated the humans by keeping their distance, but as the human population expanded, as humans do, they began to marginalize the Yason, which eventually escalated into a full-scale war—a war that favored the humans at first due to their experience, but over time swung in favor of the stronger Yason. As the game begins, after 30 years of fighting, the humans are set to mount a massive attack to turn the tide, within which the Tears of Blood, an elite mercenary unit lead by Calintz, have agreed to partake. But the battle is short-lived as the Yason's spiritual leader easily puts down the human attack, sending Calintz and company, dejected, back to headquarters—a destination Calintz will never reach. Through a daring turn of events, Calintz, separated and alone, discovers the beautiful Reith, an omnipotent priestess with amnesia who appears to be on neither side. Sought by the Yason, misunderstood by the humans, and seemingly the key link to the future for both, Reith, and thusly Calintz and the Tears of Blood, have become pivotal in a war where it is unclear who is right and who is wrong, the only certainty being the hatred and contempt each side harbors for the other...

It wasn't long ago that I bid a fond adieu to the turn-based RPG rank and file, citing the tired walk/fight nature of engagement and traditional load-in/enter-commands/load-out battle interface, which it seemed FFXII was about to rectify (via a system now rumored to be undergoing some sort of overhaul). After Grandia II got it so very right, for some reason things reverted back to the norm, leaving me, and I'm sure many others, disenchanted with the same old tired system. Aside from Final Fantasy X-2, I hadn't truly reveled in any RPG (a genre I once lived for) until Magna Carta, which arrived just in the nick of time. After a steady diet of instant gratification, I have a newfound admiration for the serenity and pacing of a good RPG. Repetition interrupted by morsels of story, leading up to dramatic pivotal events, followed by more of the same only better, has never felt quite so good, due in no small part to the myriad of unique elements that make this RPG in particular so wonderful. On the surface, Magna Carta's virtues are quite clear: Stunning character designs, beautiful cinemas, engrossing soundtrack (oh, do they ever nail the soundtrack) and an innovative battle system are more than enough to base a purchase on, but looking deeper still, Magna Carta avoids nearly every genre-endemic pratfall while playing host to a passel of systems all its own that give it an extra measure of profundity for those who savor optimal character management and lore. If you like to really get lost in your RPGs, Magna Carta is your holy grail, and if not, you can slide by on skill and tactics alone and still have a great time...especially if you've got a rhythmic soul.

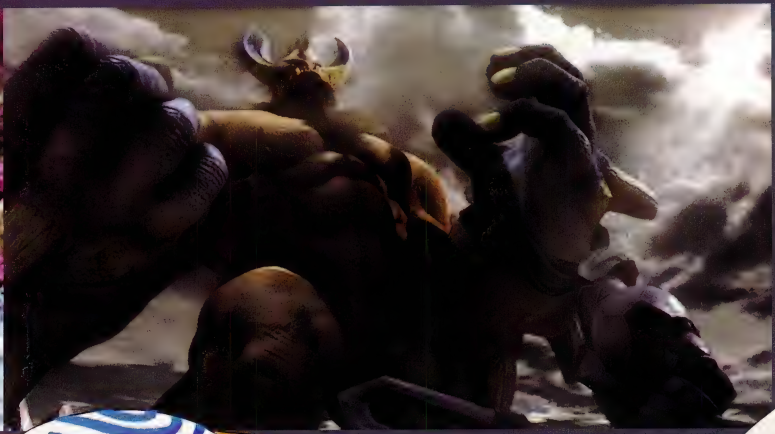
Touching on the surface elements first, the battle system ranks as pretty much the soul of the game. Battles commence either by the monsters or players gaining "First Strike." Walking in the world, your character will be surrounded by a small field within which you can see otherwise hidden monsters. When running, however, the circle is small, and so they will almost always get the drop on you, which freezes your gauge while theirs builds, giving them time to strike first and align. Walking with your weapon drawn, however, while slower (it looks cooler too), the field circumference is much wider, letting you see the monsters from a distance so you can wait for them to turn their back and then strike them, giving you the upper hand in battle, which is key in obtaining victories quickly without using valuable Talismans. By design, SoftMax set out to base their battles on rhythm over menu selection, and I have to say, the rhythm has it. The Standard mode of attack, triggered by the Leadership Gauge, which fills over time to signal each turn, presents a rotating three-button ring called the "Trinity Circle" on which to time three strikes in sync with the top circle as the button letters pass (O-X-X, X-O-O, etc.). Hitting within the circle gets you a "Good;" hitting it just right gets you a "Great;" and missing entirely loses the turn, giving the enemy the upper hand. "Good" strikes result in a standard attack, then sequentially more strikes

I have faith in you.
But, if it becomes too dangerous, pull back





Right: The Trinty Circle in effect.
Below left: The ensuing strike.

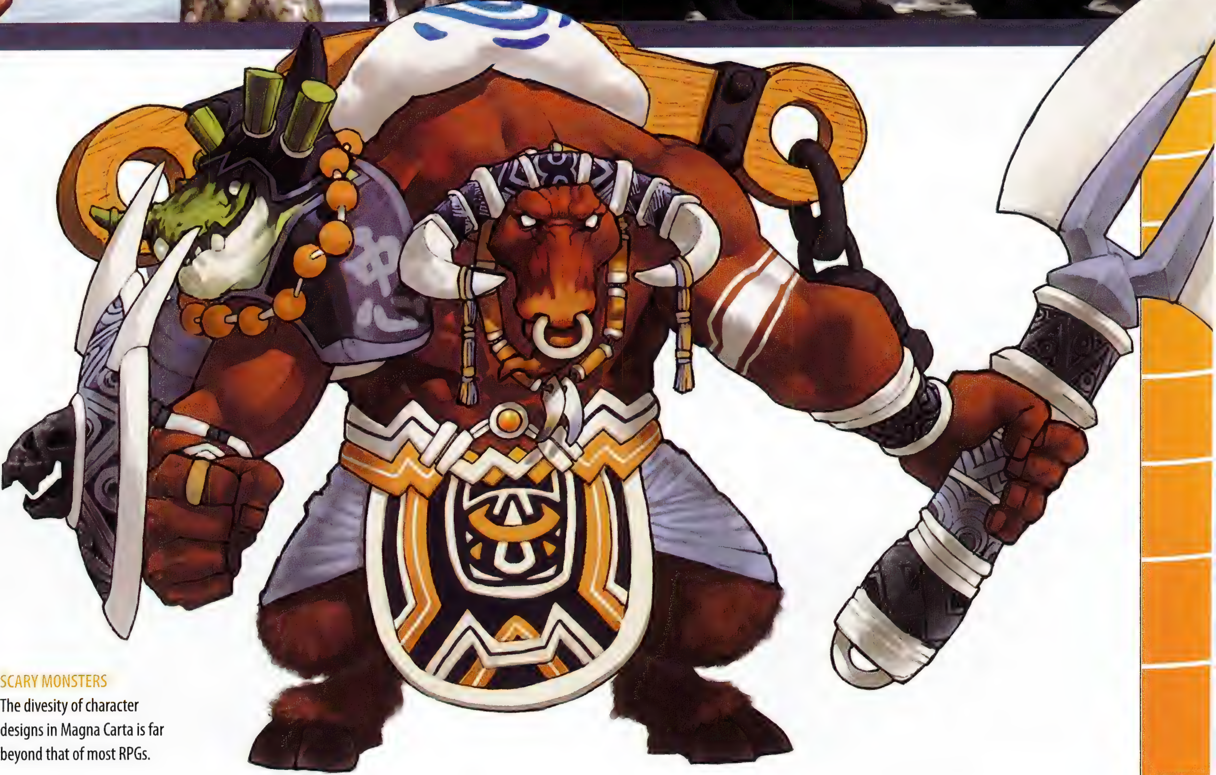


as you connect further circles… Calintz, for instance, will strike twice his first turn, three times his second, and lay down a serious combo on his third; but miss once and he goes back to the beginning, as does the Trinity Drive. For each "Great," your Trinity Drive gains 5 percent of a possible 100, which after building up to 30 percent you can activate by pressing the Square button and then nailing your next sequence for a fatal blow. Although a little awkward at first, the system rapidly becomes second nature and, as the game pushes on, completely addictive. Factors such as Chi and which characters you choose to participate in battle also affect your offensive. Standard MP and HP synthesis are out the window in Magna Carta, replaced by Chi and Talismans, which can be used for, among many other things, changing Chi Lanterns along the trail to give you the edge in battle. For instance, if enemies are using lightning strikes in a certain region, changing the Chi of the lantern to wind will weaken the enemy and strengthen any character that uses the wind Chi. You can also combine Talismans to create new items for healing, assorted spells, resurrection, amplification, etc. A typical HP drink in Magna Carta is the Talisman "A small thank you," but you might combine it with another to form an even stronger elixir, choosing from a book you fill with page after page of different types as you acquire or purchase them in your travels. When the Chi runs dry, a good assortment of Talismans is your best friend in battle.

Without babbling on too much further about battle system, I'll just say it's the first since ll's where I actually look forward to plus hours into its approximate 50 and I'm still loving it—and learning. At first you'll find that all you really need is Calintz and First Strike to win, seldom even bringing your other two characters into the fray, but as the game wears on, the battles become much more tactical and engulfing, and Chi and Talismans important variables. Each fighting area is free for you to roam and position your companions; and the enemies, aside from being exquisite to behold (Hyung-Tae Kim is a true master) are opportunistic to say the least. Touching on the other two battle modes, Combo is wicked-hard but results in stunning Crazy Attacks (a second Trinity Circle follows the first, spinning much faster), though you run the risk of failing and losing turns, and in Counter Mode, you can repel the enemies' button commands without using the Leadership Meter and always counter with stronger attacks, but the risks are high; not only do you need to learn each enemy's sequence, but you can never attack first. Save it to say, I haven't embraced either just yet. I tried Combo for a while but found myself intimidated, crying like the slacker I've become for a training level that doesn't exist. Perhaps on the next pass…

Leadership too plays a big role in Magna Carta. Your party doesn't just go along for the ride; they're integral to the plight and must be spoken to and nurtured throughout your travels. Giving them the proper gifts, be it food or trinket, buying them new weapons and equipping them correctly, reassuring them and winning battles all affect your relationships—variables that play out in nearly every facet of the game.

Further plumbing its depths, Magna Carta's formidable substructure offers a throng of amenities for the discerning adventurer. While purchasing weapons and items is carried out in traditional manner, for instance, upgrading them is not. Local blacksmiths are more than happy to put your steel to their anvils, but they don't take American Express; they'll always have a quest for you to complete in order to earn their services. And then there's the fortune tellers: priestesses that, for a fee, will tell your fortunes, which has an effect on the probabilities of experience obtained, surprise attack evasion, money obtained, acquiring new skills and escaping through four ranks of luck, from very lucky to



SCARY MONSTERS
The divesity of character designs in Magna Carta is far beyond that of most RPGs.

You k
We'll figh
don you.
e have to.

"…SoftMax set out to base their battles on rhythm over menu selection…"

very unlucky. You can exorcise (and thus nullify) fortune results or not ask in the first place, but they are there nevertheless, and since this is also where you manage Talismans and have items appraised, well, who can resist? Tired of the same old fighting techniques? Obtaining scrolls and dropping into a dojo for the requisite training, you can add additional fighting styles to your repertoire and switch them out at any time, and should you find yourself drained after battle, rather than the traditional opening of the menu and requisite potion dispersal, you can drop to a knee at any time and heal free of charge. I also like that once you eliminate monsters within a sector, as long as you don't leave and come back, they stay gone, giving you the opportunity to further explore the area, looking for the odd chest or path. Save it to say, the world of Magna Carta is quite unique unto itself. SoftMax borrows very little from traditional RPGs, and the game is all the better for it. Take the vendors, for instance: On the PS2, notorious for loading, most RPGs put them behind closed doors in shops which have to load in and load out…which sucks. Go in the wrong door and you just end up pissed off. In Magna Carta, everyone key in town is outside. And while they don't have a bag of items or wagon to make it seem "real," it totally streamlines the process of re-equipping and managing items and characters in each center. There are no doors leading to one-room houses where random people might say "there sure have been a lot monsters appearing lately" when what they should be doing is explaining why they have a bed outside the kitchen. In Magna Carta, if a door is open, a key event transpires behind it. The game does load into and out of battles briefly, and between large maps, but room-to-room within structures, everything is pretty much instant. Great care was taken in every facet of the game which, given its breadth, is admirable bordering on anal retentive…which in RPG creation is a very good thing.

> "I haven't found a single element overdone or used as a crutch or for filler..."

Everything about Magna Carta, from its flow to its turbulent turn of events, flashbacks and imbedded drama, is refreshing in some way. Amidst elements both key and ancillary, everything is thought through and purposeful in such a manner that the experience evolves for the duration. I haven't found a single element overdone or used as a crutch or for filler, which is nothing short of a miracle for a 50-hour console RPG this beautiful.

For those naysayers out there who might hang me on the proverbial cross for not pointing out a few weak spots, they are, of course, system endemic, and therefore not so much weak as much as inherent. There's a spot of loading, as I mentioned, due to the system's limited cache, and the textures aren't taken directly from rock and dirt samples from the old country (although they are very nicely laid), but what the PS2 lacks in those areas, Magna Carta more than makes up for in its exceptional character designs and in-game models (and not just the main characters, but the Yason and throngs of beasts you'll fight along the way as well), battle system, pacing and story. There are no blue gumdrops to battle in Magna Carta…in fact, there's not a single attacking vegetable or blob of any kind. Enemies are diverse and change with every region, and although there are some floating sea creatures in the mix (a la Final Fantasys of old), the creatures are all fully mutated beings, dispelling the last of my afflictions with traditional turn-based RPGs. (I deplore fighting amoebas for hours on end.) My sole grievance in Magna Carta lies with Calintz's slightly limited animation (his walk is a bit stiff and running has no variation), but compared to most RPG leads, he's better than the vast majority of what's come out of Japan since the dawn of 3D, and design-wise among the best ever.

When it comes to video games, "Made in Korea" is rapidly becoming a ringing endorsement. Not only are they more committed to the artistic side of the medium than I've ever seen, but of late they're exhibiting their own unique brand of gameplay prowess—the byproduct of years of watching and waiting for their time in the gaming spotlight—that is truly a break from the norm: traits that, with any luck, they'll be applying to more and more genres in the not-so-distant future. Until then, Magna Carta will certainly suffice.

Magna Carta: Tears of Blood

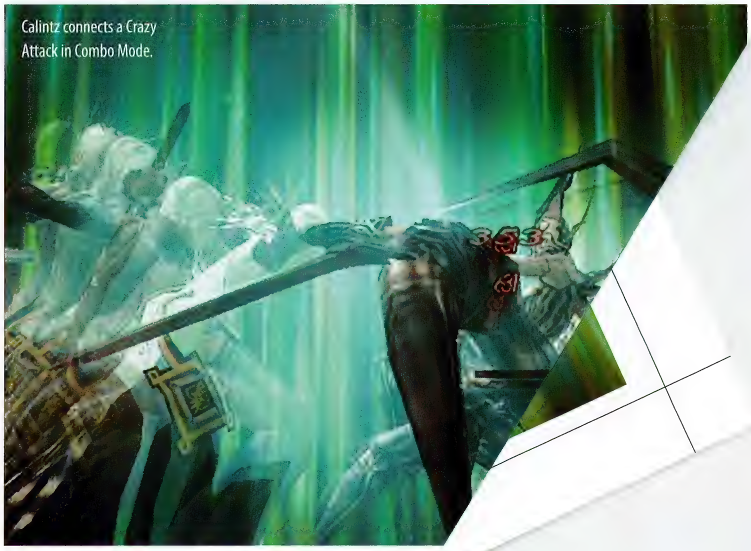
Preview

PlayStation 2

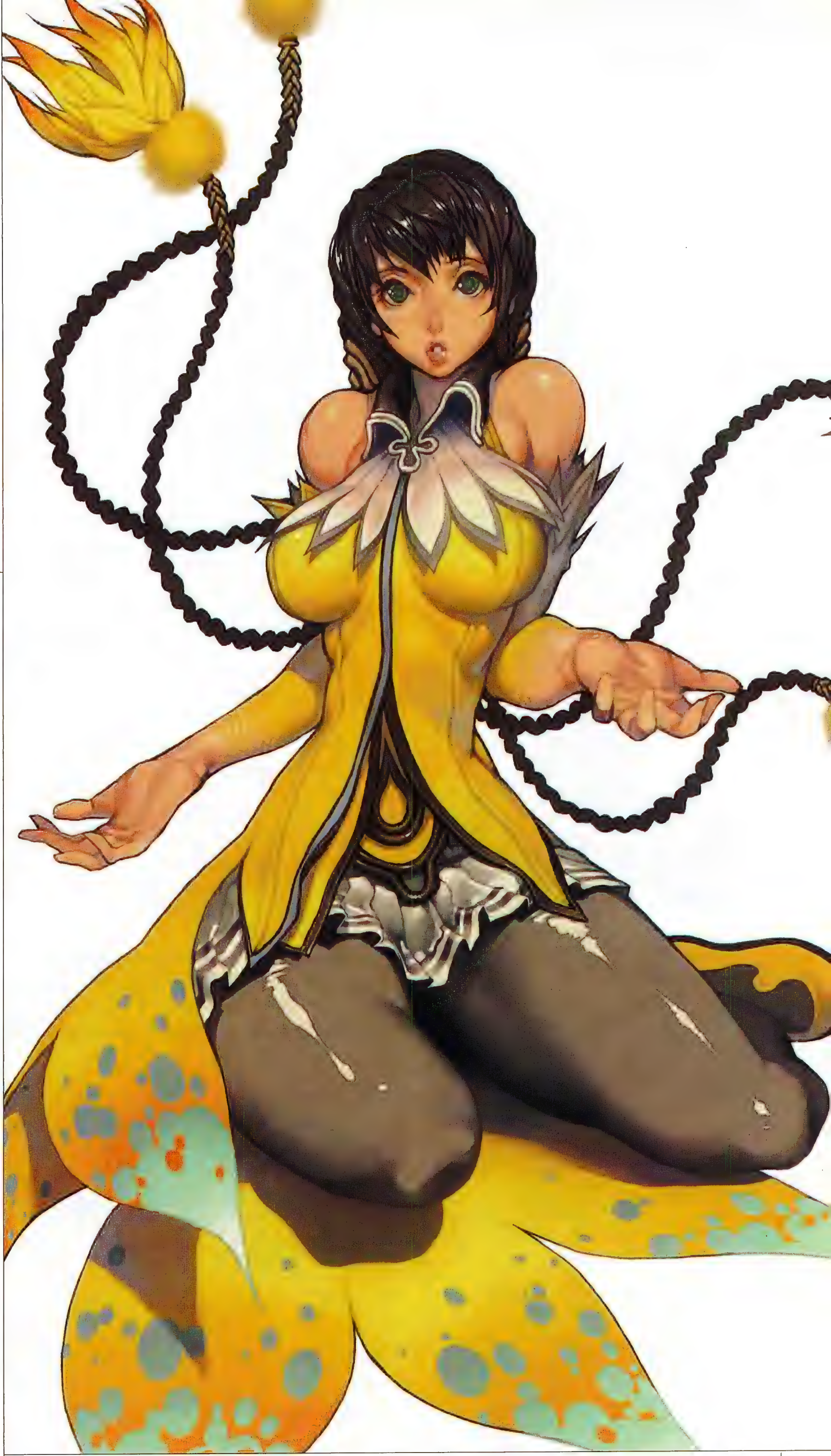
Point of Interest

Magna Carta (Crimson Stigmata) was the first RPG developed for the PlayStation 2 in Korea and originally featured an infinitely better opening theme that ended up tangled in some red tape.

Developer: SoftMax **Publisher:** Atlus
Online: None **Available:** October



Calintz connects a Crazy Attack in Combo Mode.



INTERVIEW

Hyung-Tae Kim, Character Designer

Inside SoftMax... Men and women at work—all for you.

play: These are some of the most exquisite character and enemy designs we have ever seen. Where do you draw from to create so many and such an amazing cross section of designs?
Hyung-Tae Kim: I've been influenced by so many different cultures and types of media; it's hard to say exactly what has affected me. I gather information from movies, comics and animation from many different countries, as well as from ancient ruins and pieces of art. If I have the ability to create interesting designs, I think it comes from applying what I've learned from my own designs rather than from what I've seen.

Did you have training or go to school to learn your craft?
I did go to an art institute where I was a visual design major. However, I believe that the sketches and compositions I practiced to get into college, along with the basic procedures I studied, helped me a lot more.

Do you sketch and color your own work?
Yes. I handle everything from buying paper and pens to handing over the completed work to the marketing team.

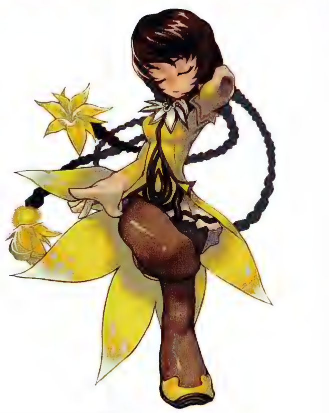
How much pre-production was involved in developing the characters for Magna Carta?
During pre-production, I design characters that are somewhat distinct. I do this because there are times when scenarios are based on those designs. Depending on the importance and role of the character, the extent differs greatly.

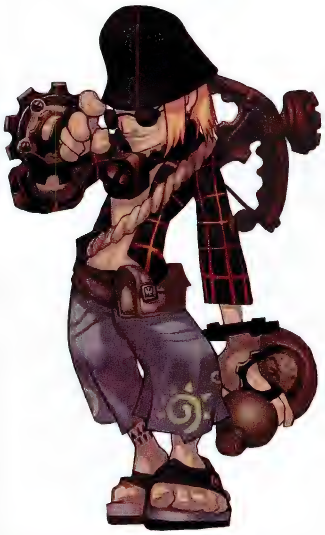
As beautiful as they look on PS2, you must be eager to see your designs on next-generation hardware where they can truly come to life within the game. Are you currently working on any next-generation video game projects?
I can't say anything for sure at the moment, but I am very interested in creating games and artwork for next-gen systems. The limits of technology have expanded far beyond what people can create, so the question now is how far the artist can reach.

> "I gather information from movies, comics and animation from many different countries..."
>
> Hyung-Tae Kim, Character Designer

Since you've designed the characters for Magna Carta, how integral have you been in the overall creative process regarding Magna Carta?
In regards to game creation, I not only handle the illustrations and design, but I also work on creating 3D models. There are times when I work on rendering the models myself, but I mostly manage the general quality, finishes and coloring of the game. At the beginning of the project, I mostly handle the technical direction and styling.

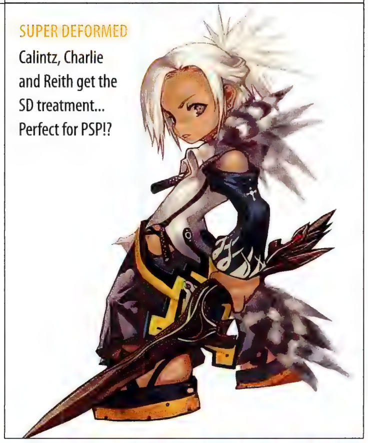
Are you a big game or RPG fan? What are some of your favorite games or RPGs?





SUPER DEFORMED

Calintz, Charlie and Reith get the SD treatment... Perfect for PSP!?



I like most genres, but I especially like RPGs and racing games, and nothing beats my love of fighting games. Lately, I've become interested in the expanding genre of FPS.

Are you a fan of any art or media here in the West? Has anything from our culture crossed over or made an impression in Korea?
My illustrations utilize a Western pattern of expression, which shows how much I've been influenced by it. Asian art has expanded on lines, whereas western art has expanded on surfaces and light, so I took a lot from there. I think that with modern technology, the exchange of culture and information will become more common. Well, of course, we're already in that stage...

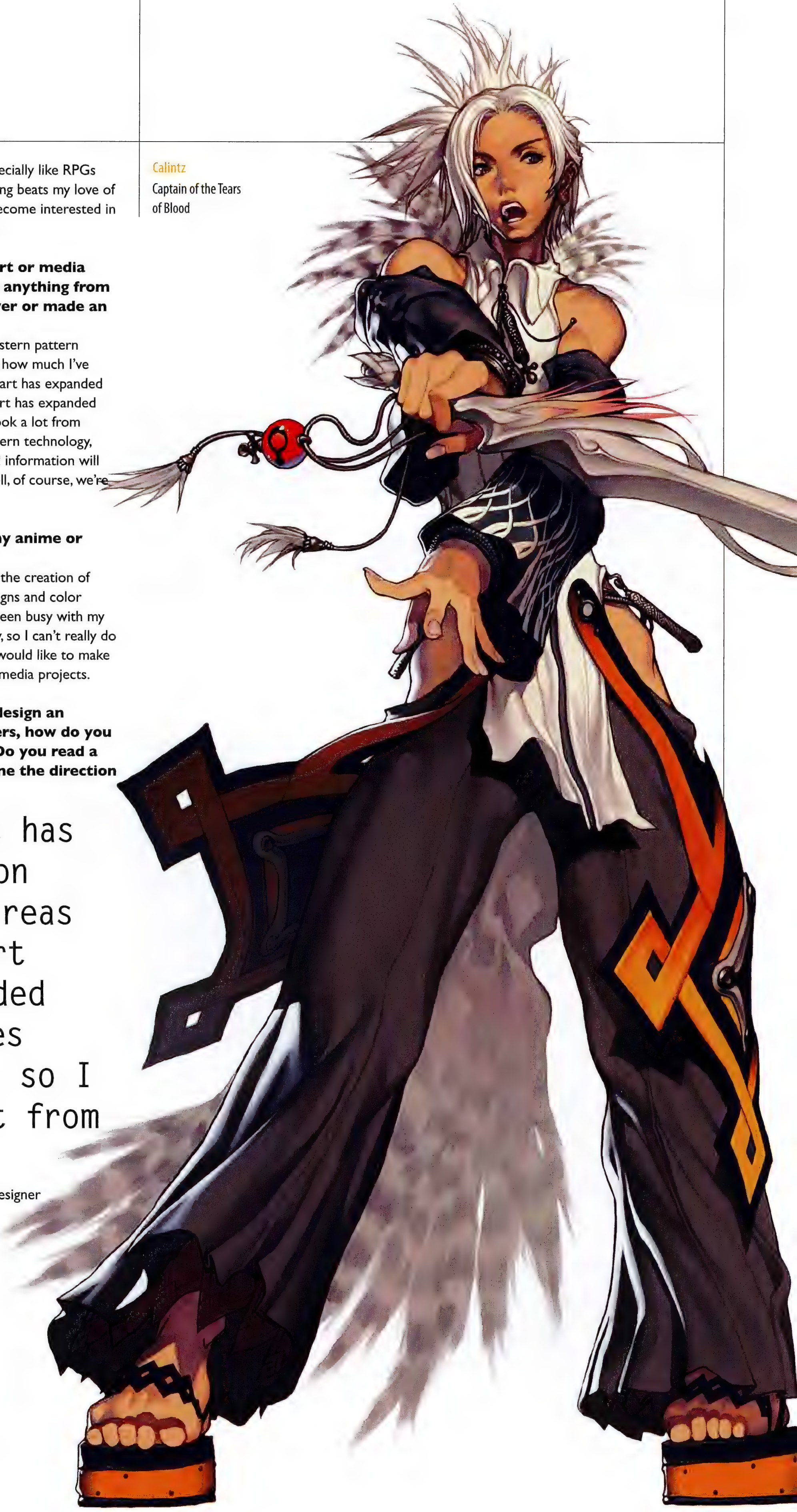
Are you involved in any anime or manga projects?
In the past, I participated in the creation of several pilot films, early designs and color illustrations, but lately I've been busy with my work in the gaming industry, so I can't really do any of that now. One day, I would like to make the time to work on other media projects.

When you set out to design an entire cast of characters, how do you visualize their looks? Do you read a script first to determine the direction

> "Asian art has expanded on lines, whereas western art has expanded on surfaces and light, so I took a lot from there."
>
> Hyung-Tae Kim, Character Designer

Calintz

Captain of the Tears of Blood



your designs will take or create the characters first and let the game developers apply the personalities?
Usually, we all meet to discuss ideas. Once a certain direction is agreed on, then I start designing. However, the process of how I create characters isn't solely based on that direction. The creation of some characters is based on previous artworks, while the creation of others is based on ideas I have from reading books. In the past there were many times when I had to redraw characters over and over because none of us understood what the others wanted. However, now we know each other well enough that I can complete a design after receiving a few recommendations regarding my rough sketches.

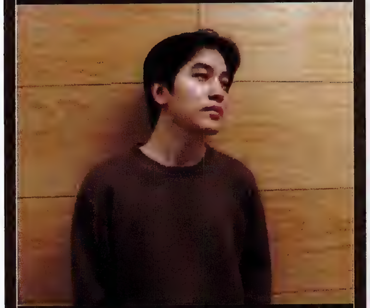
Calintz is certainly one of the most provocative male leads ever. He's slight and flashy, but at the same time tough and proud. Did you toil a lot over his final look?
In RPGs, the player comes to understand the main character's personality as he or she progresses through the game. Knowing that, I tried to base half of Calintz's personality on his looks, and the other half on a completely different cultural code. I was thinking that in this day and age, the male body can be used as a "weapon" just as much as the female body can, so I had Calintz wear a gender-neutral outfit. It wasn't difficult for me, but the other staff members were totally confused by my decision.

Your female characters are breathtaking to say the least, especially Reith. I noticed that you like to really accentuate the legs of your female characters. Is this your vision of the ultimate woman?
I believe that the legs are a very attractive part of the female body. I worked hard on portraying them so that they convey a feeling of fetishism and at the same time have a kitsch appeal. Don't get me wrong here; I prefer personality over looks.

Who is your favorite character in the game?
I like the two main characters, Calintz and Reith, because I put so much effort into them. I also like Justina, whose outfit I designed based off an improved hanbok, which is a traditional Korean dress.

Where can people see more of or purchase your designs?
I've had my illustrations published in several comics, but unfortunately I don't have any official books published. I would like to put one together in the future, so please keep an eye out for it.

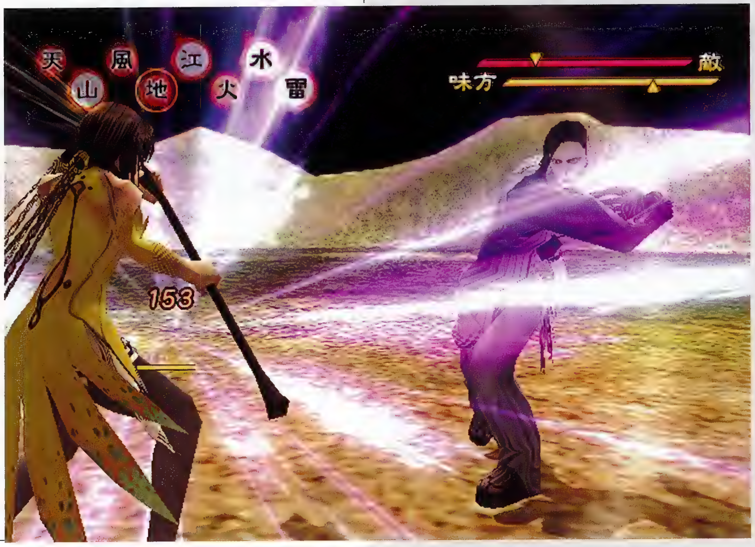
The sounds of Magna Carta



Jang Sung Woon Music Composer

Hwayobi Park Japanese Theme Song

Although it's a shame Hwayobi Park's original intro theme didn't make it into the U.S. version, MC's is still one of the best RPG soundtracks in years.



INTERVIEW

Yeon-Kyu Choi, Director of Development

play: Setting out to design and implement an RPG is a huge endeavor. How did you go about the process? Did you write the story first or begin with the characters and world? What type of research went into Magna Carta?
Yeon-Kyu Choi: We did all of it around the same time. For this project, we put a lot of care into the setting of the world, so the designs of our illustrator could be used to the fullest. For example, Hyung-Tae Kim likes to draw muscles, so we eliminated most types of armor.

Did you spend a lot of time determining what type of battle system to implement?
It took about a year to plan everything.

Tell us about the thinking behind the rhythmic gauge, especially since the penalty for missing a beat is so steep.
If you were to say that Western fantasy involves power versus power with huge swords clanging against heavy armor, then you could say that Asian fantasy involves skill versus skill. We tried to convey that idea by creating the Trinity Circle, which focuses heavily on timing.

There is also a lot of opportunity for the player to engage in battle in different ways. Was it your intention to develop a system that would evolve and grow on a personal level throughout the quest?
Yes, it was. We wanted to have the player feel like he or she is getting stronger, not just simply leveling up characters.

> "We wanted to have the player feel like he or she is getting stronger, not just simply leveling up characters."

The field portions are unique as well, scouting with weapon drawn to get the jump on enemies. Was this created to break the drudgery of traditional overworld walk-fight battle scenarios?
Other RPGs have first strikes and surprise attacks, but many are random, and to tell you the truth, we weren't satisfied with it. We wanted to create a system that could be used strategically. We also wanted to create a system that the player would be satisfied with.

You've injected so many variables into Magna Carta: Talismans, fortune telling, training dojos for different styles, side-quests from blacksmiths... How dramatic of an effect do these have on the game? Do players really need to go deep into the fabric of the game to succeed or are these elements present for those gamers looking to unearth every scrap of gameplay and stay in the game for many additional hours?
Our objective was to incorporate both elements in the game. As a maker of RPGs, we want to give the player the most game content possible.

Leadership also seems very important in the game. What are the

consequences if you do not develop close relationships between your party members?
To be brief, the consequence is that it will require more time for the Leadership meter to accumulate to the turn marks. The Leadership meter refills over time, so the number of actions the player can take in battle will be decreased.

Who is your favorite character in the game?
Reith is my favorite character; she's friendly, yet has a strong will.

Would you say the story is more dramatic or action-oriented? Is there a lot of high drama or is it a more streamlined tale about warring factions?
It's more drama-oriented. We wanted to do a story about enemy races beginning to understand each other.

What would you say is the biggest challenge creating an epic RPG?
I think it has to do with the scale of it all. We always end up needing more resources, so production time lingers on and expenses increase.

Did you choose the PS2 platform because of its dominance in the retail marketplace?
Yes, especially since it's virtually the only choice for the Japanese market.

The CG in the game is absolutely breathtaking. Was this created in-house? How much is there throughout the game?
Everything was created in-house. Besides the opening and ending, there are a couple other main scenarios where CG was used.

Magna Carta began as a PC game. How does the console version differ?
It's a completely different game; there is no relationship whatsoever regarding world overview and system. It might have been more appropriate to call it "Magna Carta 2." In both Japan and the United States, however, the PC version was never released, so we decided to call it "Magna Carta."

Was the game big in Korea? Is PC gaming big there or will the PS2 game sell better in the Korean market?
There still aren't that many PS2s in Korea, so the PC version sold better.

How large is your team, and how long have you been working on Magna Carta? Do you burn the midnight oil or do you have the freedom to keep regular hours?
It took us about three years to complete it and we had an average of about 40 people working on it throughout. And of course, it was one all-nighter after the next.

Are you scoring the game in-house or employing a symphony?
We started with an in-house staff, but in the middle of production, they created their own independent studio. However, they are still in charge of our game music.

Korean-designed games are quickly becoming quite popular here in the States. What do you think has sparked this? Is this something you have always wanted or just something that has come up recently?
Because of Korea's position in the game industry, we were able to come into contact with both Japanese and American games. Thanks to that, we were able to learn the advantages of both countries' games without any restrictions. Now that that generation has grown up, we were able to create a game that blends our culture with the strong points of other cultures.

What is your ultimate goal as a creative organization?
Our goal is to create a new game concept that players from all over the world can share and enjoy.

What would you like to convey to U.S. RPG fans regarding Magna Carta? How is it special in your eyes and words?
As I mentioned earlier, we would like to have players see it as a new type of Asian RPG. And we hope that they enjoy the unique atmosphere of Magna Carta. **play**

Reith, a girl you will come to know very well, during one of her happier moments.

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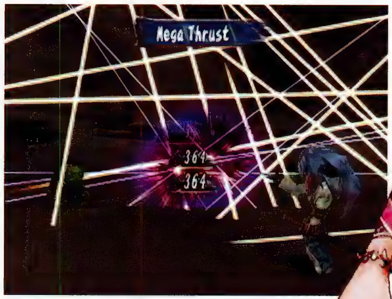
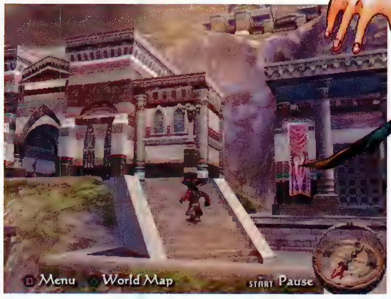
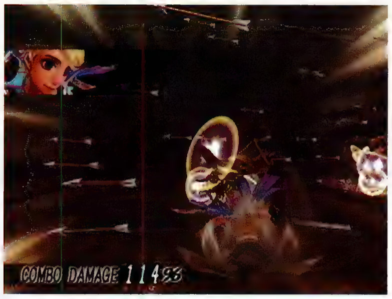
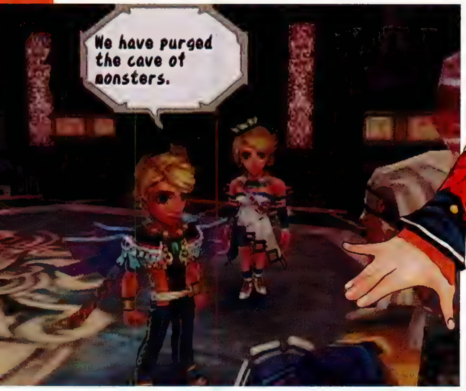
Romancing SaGa

Decisions, decisions, decisions

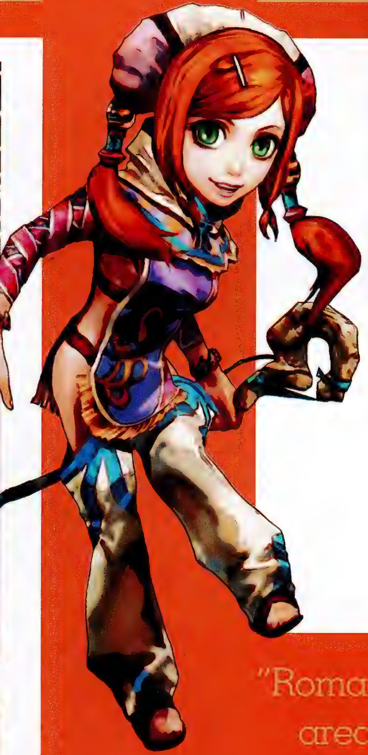


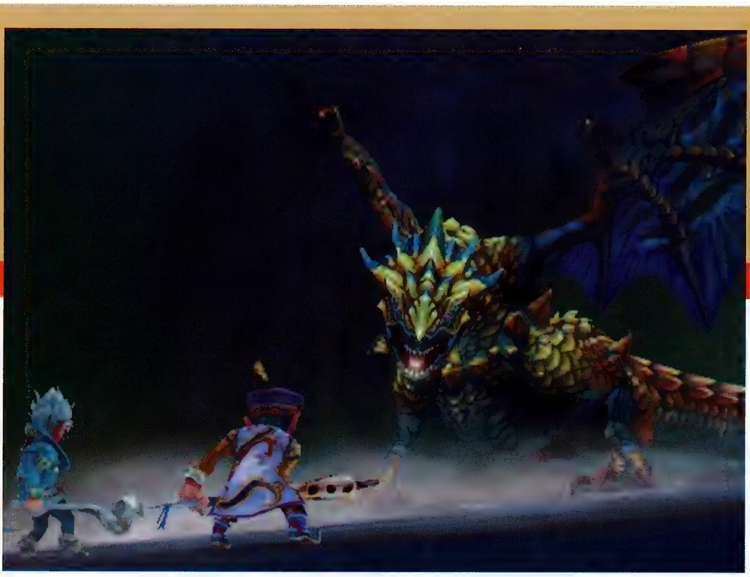


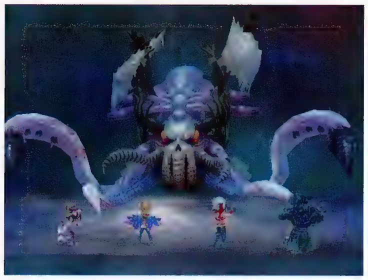




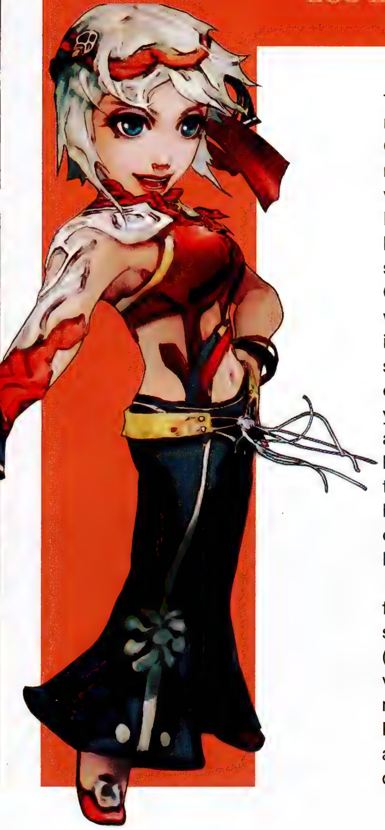
The visual details are nice, but the Thunderbirds-like proportions are a bit freaky.







Menu
START Pause



There are a lot of games out there classified in the role-playing category, but as good as many of them are, most just have the player coming along for the ride and witnessing a story rather than really playing a role. Romancing SaGa—a remake of the 16-bit Super Famicom game released back in 1992—is going against this norm, actually putting the players in control of their own destiny and letting them live out their adventure as they see fit.

> "Romancing SaGa's biggest area of freedom, however, lies in its combat system."

It all starts with eight diverse characters to choose from: Albert, the young nobleman; Aisha, the female nomad; Gray, the adventurer; Claudia, the ranger; Jamil, the thief; Sif, the barbarian woman; Captain Hawke, the pirate; and Barbara, the traveling dancer. Each one has their own goals—Albert is trying to save his homeland from monsters, while Claudia just wants to get out and see the world—but it's up to the player how to do it and who to do it with. There are loads of secondary characters—warriors, mages, even lizardmen and other beasts—who you can recruit to help you on your quest, and many locales you're free to travel to, but everything is somehow connected to the evil god Saruin, who, 1000 years after being imprisoned by the Fatestones, is on the brink of returning to the world of Mardias.

Romancing SaGa's biggest area of freedom, however, lies in its combat system. Between weapons skills (swords, staves, bows, axes, clubs, etc.), various barehanded fighting styles, 10 magic categories (Pyrology, Hydrology, Demonology, Necromancy and more), abilities that use Battle Points (similar to other games' MP), others that up Durability Points (weapons become unusable when DP is depleted) and yet others that use precious Life Points, the amount of options is nearly overwhelming. As with other games in the SaGa series, characters in RS learn new, more powerful physical skills simply by using moves from the same category in battle, and linked team techniques are possible too. There are even abilities to learn and use outside of battle, such as finding hidden treasure or leaping over pits.

Add in features like the SaGa series' tradition of leveling up stats individually after each fight instead of traditional experience gain, and you have one seriously hardcore RPG in the making.

Chris Hoffman

Romancing SaGa

PlayStation 2

Preview

Point of Interest

Some of the earliest games in the SaGa series were on the Game Boy. They were re-titled as the Final Fantasy Legend games in North America.

Developer: Square Enix **Publisher:** Square Enix
Online: None **Available:** October

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MotoGP 3

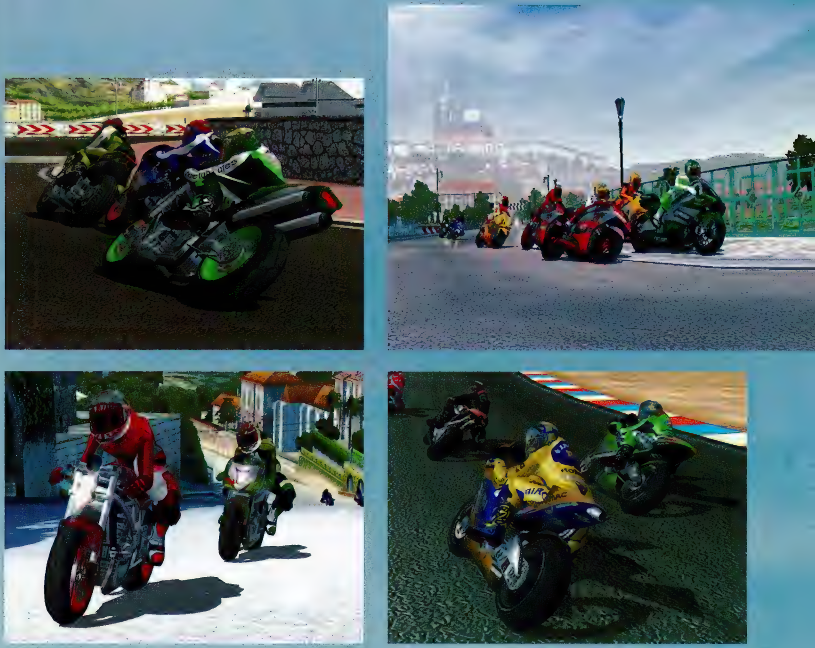
Ultimate Racing Technology

Crotch rocket rumble

There's nothing quite like the feel of a truly great racer where all of the requisite elements combine to create a trance-like flow between game and player. Nowhere is this union as symbiotic as it is in GP racing, a sport that involves a level of concentration and coordination beyond anything in racing.

And MotoGP 3 gets it all right: weight distribution, physics, animation, braking… It may not seem so at first (road racing is all based on pre-empting), but as you master the technique and begin refining different aspects of your bike, things come into focus to the point you ultimately become fused with the gyrations of your on-screen projectile. While this sensation has been nailed before, it's never been done in such a complete package. MotoGP 3 takes us beyond the confines of the GP circuit, where things tend to get a little flat, into Extreme Mode, adding 16 new tracks to the 17 recreated GP courses from last year. Set in (and loosely based on) cities neighboring the GP tracks themselves, the EM tracks add a unique new level of racing to the mix. Jettisoning through narrow partitioned city streets, along waterways, through twisty mountain crags and sprawling countryside is where the game truly shines, and afterwards, the replays afford every possible look and angle, and the music is about as good as it gets in racing.

Customization is as you'd expect—comprehensive but not daunting—visuals are near perfection, and fine detail abounds; sprockets spin, swingarms shudder, sparks fly, smoke dissipates… you can almost smell the oil and rubber. Online, things are just as wide open with a 1-100 seeding system that allows you to specify which seeds you allow into your sessions (for fairness' sake) within the game's 16-player GP and 10-player Extreme classes. A first-class racer all the way. Dave Halverson



From the tire tread to the last anodized bolt, the bike models are near-flawless.

MotoGP: Ultimate Racing Technology 3

Xbox, PC

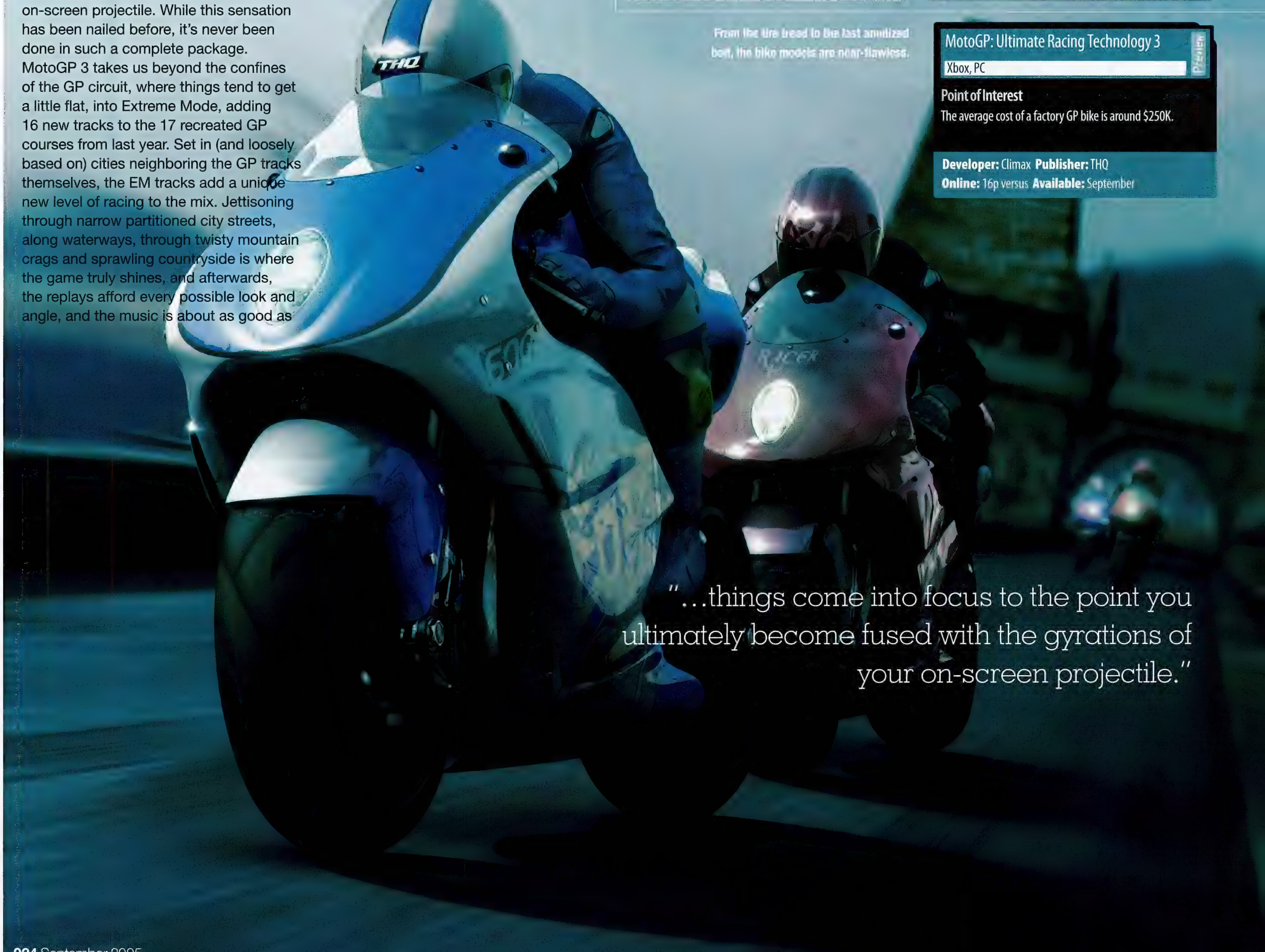
Preview

Point of Interest

The average cost of a factory GP bike is around $250K.

Developer: Climax **Publisher:** THQ

Online: 16p versus **Available:** September



> "…things come into focus to the point you ultimately become fused with the gyrations of your on-screen projectile."

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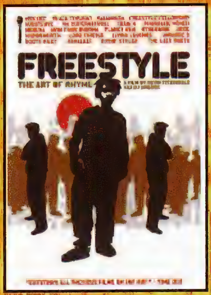
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Shin Megami Tensei

Digital Devil Saga

Devils in disguise

Atlus left diehard RPG fans with a ton of questions at the end of the original Digital Devil Saga only a few months ago. Fortunately, DDS2 picks up right where the first left off: Serph brought his tribe to Nirvana successfully…but upon arriving, they find that all its inhabitants have mysteriously turned to stone in the sunlight. Determined to reunite with their friends and make sense of everything, Serph, Argilla and Gale begin to investigate the strange things happening all around them.

Although there's not too much of a change from the original, Atlus has definitely made a few tweaks. The Mantra system is quite different…instead of taking a sphere-grid style of advancement (a la FFX), there's a hexagonal board that you can move around on to pick up new skills and abilities. Some aren't available until your party has collectively mastered every hexagon surrounding it, but most are available immediately (although you must be in range of a skill on the board to learn it). It's quite refreshing for the RPG genre, and makes for some interesting choices for advancing your characters.

DDS2's story endeavors to answer the hanging plot points left over from the first installment, although I'm confident that we'll be seeing a fair few twists and turns to be had in the process. Musically, Atlus seems to have stayed the course with their eclectic choices of music, ranging from hard-rocking guitar samples to eerie synthesizer tracks.

The character models have remained the same—still beautifully designed, rendered and animated—along with the voice work which retains a slight monotone for some characters—understandably so considering the scope of Digital Devil Saga's story—and the environments follow suit. You'll need to do a bit of backtracking here and there, but the state of the battles keep things moving at a brisk pace. Engaging the enemy remains one of Saga 2's high points; battles are very open-ended and allow for team-oriented fights as well as individual attacks.

> "Although there's not too much of a change from the original, Atlus has definitely made a few tweaks."

DDS2 is shaping up to be a very exciting sequel via the refined Mantra system, quick, turn-based battles and seamless transitions from one rich plot device to the next, as Atlus shows once again that they can hang tough with the best of the RPG powerhouses. If you're into turn-based RPGs and you didn't pick up the original, you should, in preparation of a same-year sequel that delivers new devices and finality we're used to waiting years for. Ashley Esqueda

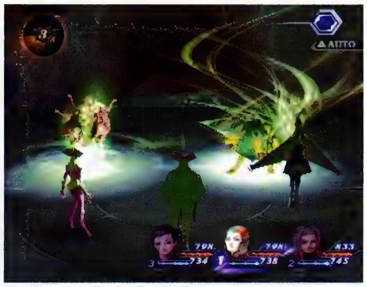
Shin Megami Tensei: Digital Devil Saga 2

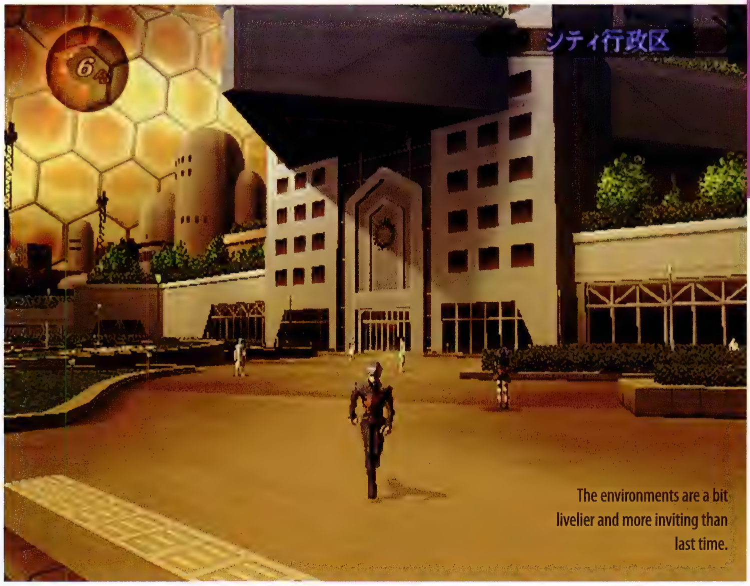
PlayStation 2

Point of Interest

As with the original, one of the key mechanics of Digital Devil Saga 2 is actually devouring your enemies.

Developer: Atlus **Publisher:** Atlus
Online: None **Available:** November





The environments are a bit livelier and more inviting than last time.

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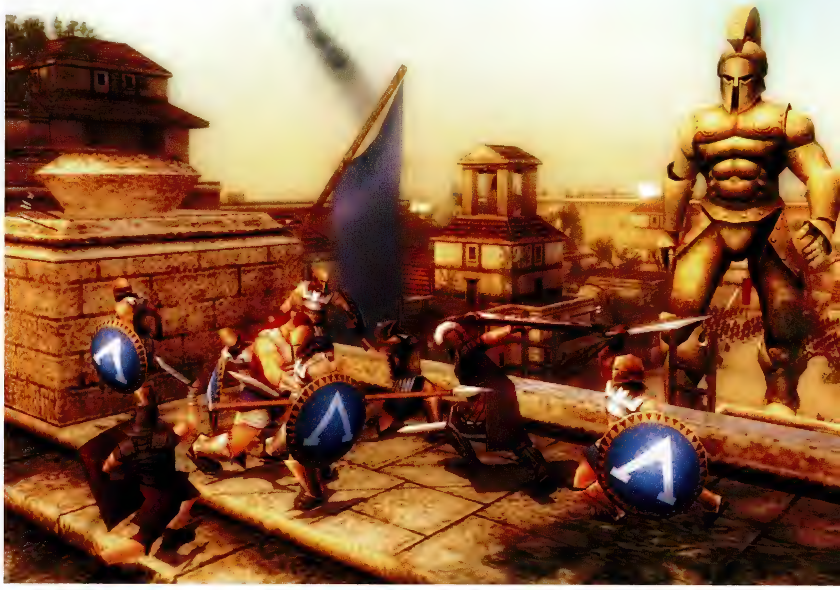
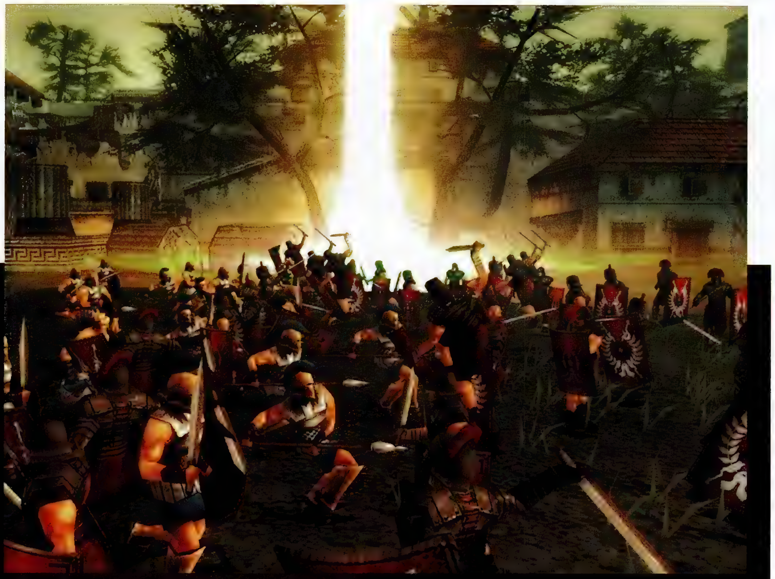
Spartan
Total Warrior

Grecian formula

My big fat Greek Centurion killing machine.





The Romans are coming, and the city of Sparta marks the last leg of their occupation of Greece. When or if Sparta falls, Greece is lost; but not if you and your brethren have anything to do with it…

At first glance Spartan: Total Warrior looks like a real-time strategy game, making the fact that it's not all the more impressive. When I see legions of tiny, nicely-detailed 3D characters, I immediately think point and click (and therefore "pass"), but in Spartan, you fight among the swarming legions. Never have I seen so many characters in so large a space, let alone organized. Unlike so many games that simply load the screen, Spartan's real-time armies are organized, making your part in each skirmish all the more compelling. Spartan is all about the art of war carried out in scripted fashion, much like EA's highly regarded LoTR: The Two Towers, where commands are barked out in the heat of battle for you to either turn the tide or seal your comrades' doom. In this case, however, the battlefields are larger, the fights bigger and the action itself a measure better, incorporating special slow motion attacks, combos, blocking, surging and a truly epic cinematic feel to the action. Fighting is fluid and exciting, with a real urgency to it, and the ambience is spot-on. Ancient Greece surrounds you and manly men beckon for your bludgeoning services, be it guiding a carried explosive to its final destination (then lighting it and watching the bodies fly) or pouring boiling hot oil onto would-be gate crashers below. Burn, baby, burn.

The animation is quite excellent, the voice and scripting well done, and the control surprisingly fluid, especially given that you can also zoom up on the action in real time. I've no idea how Creative Assembly are accomplishing this on PS2, but I'm certainly elated at the prospect and looking very forward to the final product. Sega would be wise to put some marketing muscle behind this one and roll it onto 360 where this type of game will surely make us weep tears of joy. Not that I'm not welling up a little already. Dave Halverson

> "Fighting is fluid and exciting, with a real urgency to it, and the ambience is spot-on."

Spartan: Total Warrior

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube

Point of Interest

The Spartans viewed themselves as the true inheritors of the Greek tradition. They did not partake in luxuries, expensive foods or opportunities for leisure.

Developer: Creative Assembly **Publisher:** Sega
Online: None **Available:** September

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Blood
Fantasy Violence
Language
Suggestive Themes

PlayStation®2

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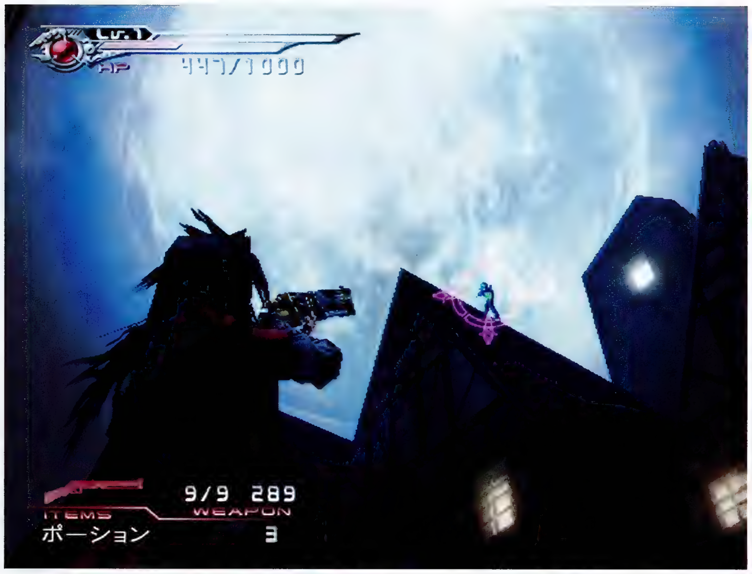
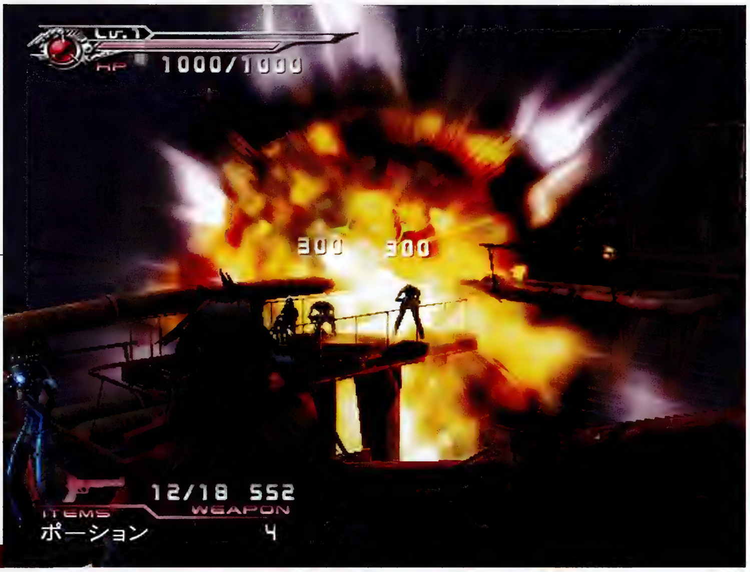


Dirge of Cerberus
-Final Fantasy VII-

Mysterious Vincent Valentine may be humanity's only hope



You remember. You remember battling Shinra forces in the streets of Midgar. Watching as Cloud Strife struggled with his identity. Gasping as Sephiroth coldly struck with his sword, creating one of the most talked about moments in gaming. And you remember exploring deep beneath the Shinra mansion in Nibelheim where you found, residing in a coffin, the enigmatic pistol-wielding former Turk, Vincent Valentine.

Now, some eight years after Final Fantasy VII hit the PlayStation, Vincent Valentine is back. Three years have passed since the events in that game (one year since the forthcoming FFVII: Advent Children movie), but as the planet continues to heal from the nearly cataclysmic effects of Meteor, Vincent finds himself cast in the unlikely role of hero once again as a new threat appears to cleanse the world of the unworthy—not in another RPG, but in an action/shooting game.

As has been the norm from Square Enix lately, many aspects of Dirge of Cerberus are being kept under wraps, but we do know that Vincent has all the tools necessary to become gaming's next big action hero. Vincent can use multiple types of firearms to dispose of enemies, using popular techniques like popping out from behind walls to attack, switching to a first-person view for a head shot, and detonating exploding barrels to take out his mysterious storm trooper-like enemies, the Deepground Soldiers, who apparently have some connection to Vincent's past. Vincent isn't abandoning his RPG roots, however; he'll be able to level up via experience points, and we'd be surprised if his ability to transform into monstrous forms doesn't play a part as well. In addition, look for return appearances by veteran characters Cait Sith and Yuffie Kisaragi in a story that promises to reveal secrets left untold in FFVII.

> "...Vincent has all the tools necessary to become gaming's next big action hero."

1000/1000
15/18 540
ポーション
3

1000/1000
15/18 555
ポーション
3

The sign says "Shinra," but they're all gone, right?

Along with the Before Crisis cell phone game, Crisis Core on PSP and the Advent Children film, Dirge of Cerberus is part of what Square Enix is calling the "Compilation of Final Fantasy VII." Whether it all lives up to the massive expectations that fans have had since the credits rolled on FFVII is still a big question mark, but things are looking good so far. Chris Hoffman

Dirge of Cerberus -Final Fantasy VII-

Preview

PlayStation 2

Point of Interest

Cerberus was a Guardian Force in FFVIII, but exactly how the creature ties into the FFVII world is yet unknown.

Developer: Square Enix **Publisher:** Square Enix
Online: None **Available:** TBA

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PlayStation 2
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Strategy RPG Returns with a BANG!

"In short, Nippon Ichi appears to be going far to ensure that Makai Kingdom is the richest and most complex game the company has released for the PS2"

"...the game is much more than just Disgaea with a fresh coat of paint"
— GameSpy

JULY 27TH 2005

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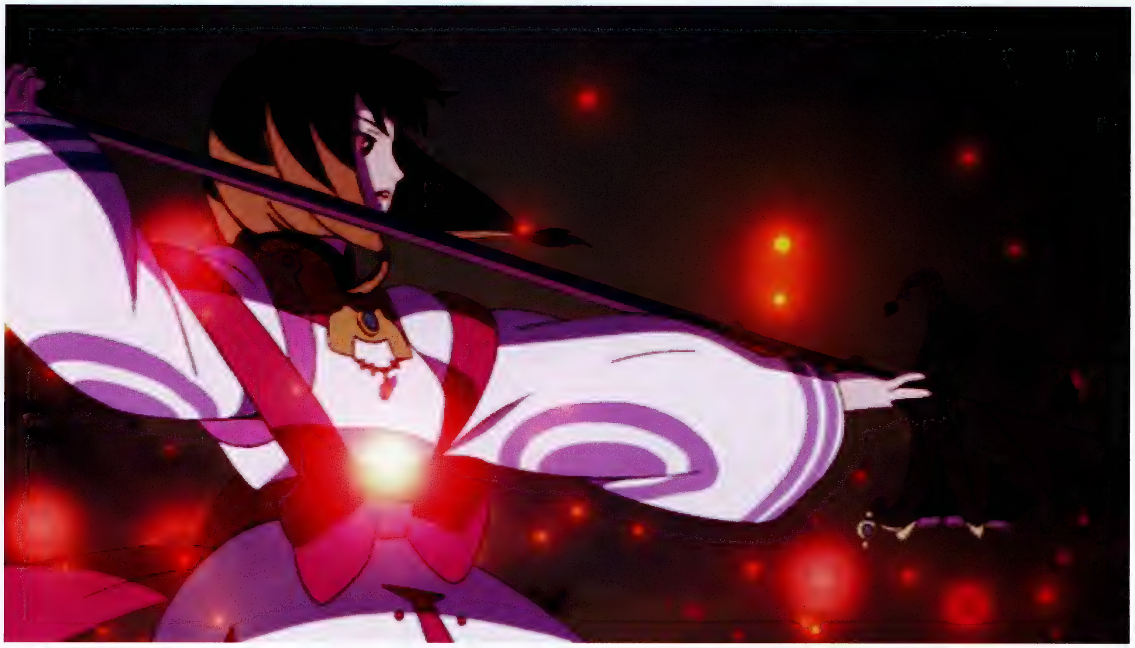
Shining Force NEO

Not quite Shining...yet



How I long for that old-school Sega adventure—the kind SoJ and Climax Entertainment used to crank out like they had a machine…Shining in the Darkness, Landstalker, Shining the Holy Ark, Dark Savior… Just conjuring those names cues each theme song in my head. Shining Tears rubbed up against it, but with Shining Force Neo I fear the kind is gone forever. Not that Neo isn't a good game; it's just not a Shining game, at least not the way I remember them. The presence of centaurs does not a Shining game make.

The funny thing is that all of the elements are in place; the models, both human and monster, are exceptional, the graphics among the best assemblage of 3/4 view polys I've seen—vivid and ultra-detailed—and the story (if it wasn't told like a kids' PBS special and horribly miscast) has all the innocence of Japanese RPGs gone by, when missions revolving around collecting herbs for dinner and puppy love were both commonplace and quaint. Here, due to lead character Max's delivery, they're just pathetic. He's supposed to be a warrior deserving of the "Force," but he speaks like an 8-year-old mama's boy and has the inflection of Beaver Cleaver. The story here is made so juvenile and sticky sweet it's hard to stomach at times. SoJ should *never* do English voice-over; it's just not their strong suit. Never has been, never will be. What's worse is that they get grandma and Max's would-be girlfriend Merrill right, adding insult to injury (it's like Carrot Top acting alongside Nicole Kidman), and there's some great anime cutscenes in here that lose their luster as soon as the speaking roles begin. They also desperately need a new writer—someone in tune with American sensibilities. Selling this children's book stuff to the current U.S. audience is going to be difficult to say the least.

The other strange thing about Neo is the lack of any real gameplay. Seeing as how the action revolves around simple monster elimination (they appear in great hordes, up to 90 at a time, and you kill them), you'd think they'd plug in some semblance of play mechanics beyond just waving swords, but that's all you do; no blocking, dodging, nada. Once you begin enhancing your Force Frames, things do improve move-wise, but still there's little technique to the game. It's more about being at the proper level and just mowing monsters down…and as beautifully realized as everything else is, that's really quite a shame. I'm only about five hours in at this point, so with any luck, as my newfound powers build, so will the game around me. I want desperately to like Neo, but I fear that more of the same lies ahead. Here's to hoping I'm mistaken. Dave Halverson

Shining Force Neo

PlayStation 2

Preview

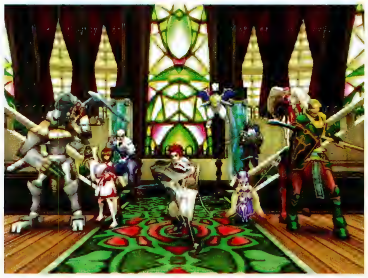
Point of Interest

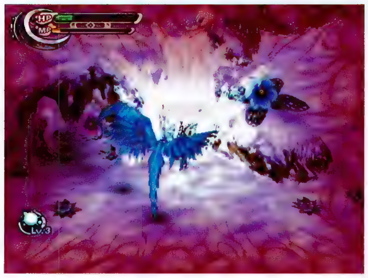
Two men, Hiroyuki Takahashi and Yasuhiro Taguchi, have worked on every (20) game in the Shining series, with the exception of Shining Soul.

Developer: Amusement Vision **Publisher:** Sega

Online: None **Available:** October

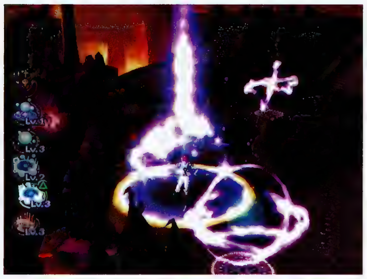
> "Not that Neo isn't a good game; it's just not a Shining game, at least not the way I remember them."

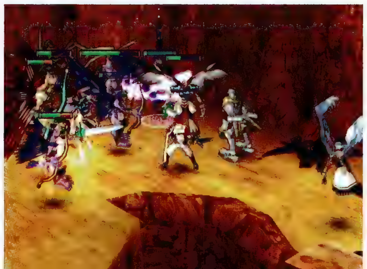


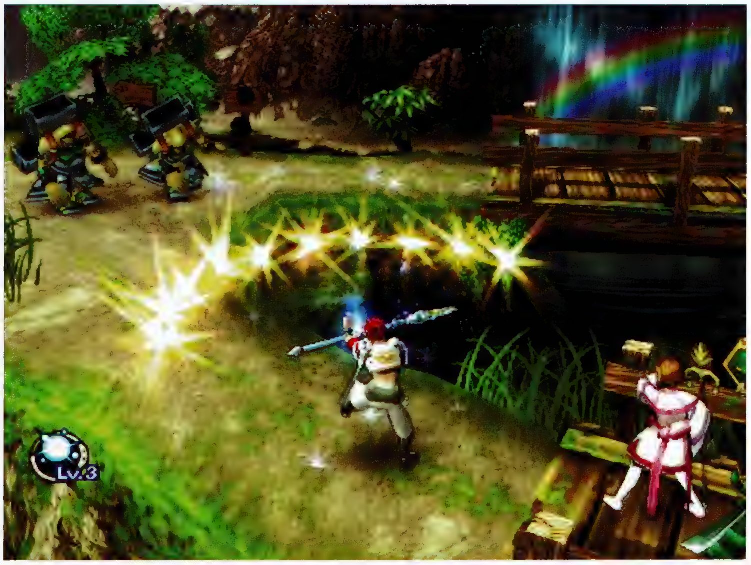


One thing is for sure: SF Neo ranks among the most breath-taking iso adventures ever.

Max delivers a massive magic attack. As the game presses on, the battles intensify.







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The Suffering

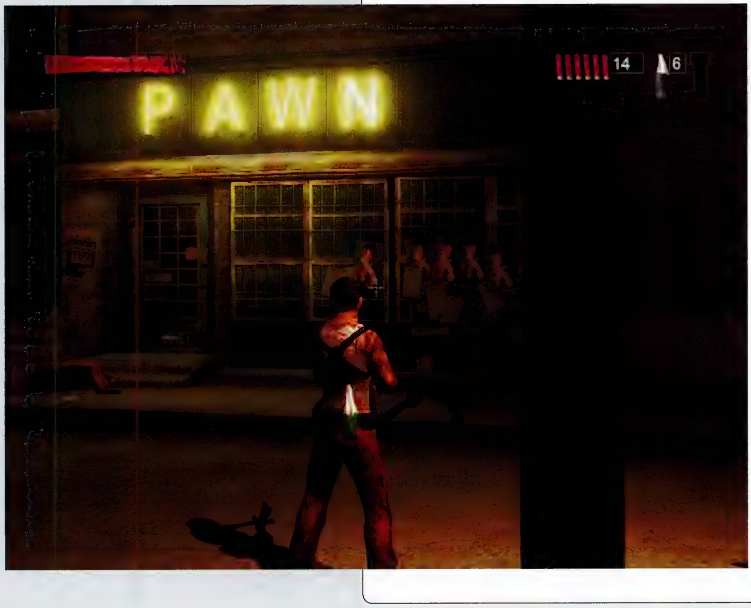
Ties That Bind

Enter a world of gruesome madness

"Once is never enough. That's the lesson learned from the tale of the Creeper, the pimp who took misogyny to the next level. He knew something of insatiable appetites."

So go the many pleasantries of The Suffering: Ties That Bind, a game that bottles the dregs of society—the pimps, the addicts, the most criminally insane—and serves them up as twisted reflections of the pains that ruled their lives, manifested as enemies for your disposal. But more than the usual target practice, these creative abominations carry a message of torture and despair, a running theme that weighs heavy throughout this unsettling game of horror.

This is the Baltimore you don't want to live in.



You play as Torque, a father of two who may or may not have slaughtered his wife. In the original The Suffering, the prison setting became his killing ground, and now we're dumped into the pits of a pestilent Baltimore. "I always wanted something better for the boys," whispers Torque's wife, as he chases after her apparition through their old apartment, which looks about as inviting as an evening in hell.

There's an unsettling, roiling edge to the game as we begin to piece together the sad dysfunction of Torque's character and his awful world that goes beyond the overt mood of the imagery. This is not a typical entry into the genre; the game's makers are reaching for something more than aggressive shock treatment and zombies that go "boo!"

Other than the most obvious changes toward a tighter inventory and dual-weapons system, Torque feels more solid in his movements, and there's added interaction with the environment. The action carries more impact than the original, which was already an accomplished game in several regards. Torque's transformation into a monster once he's fully enraged now takes metaphorical form depending on the moral choices we make on the journey: do you leave the researchers in peace, or pummel them with a rusty pipe as they flee screaming? Do you appease the prison gang and blast a tied-up guard or turn the shotgun on them in self-defense? Take the path of the depraved, and you get creepy support from an omniscient observer (our conscience?): "Yes, I like that…" The choices are certainly ambiguous at times, but we do contemplate our actions, which can't be said about most violence in games. The Suffering: Ties That Bind is directed in such a way that you can't ignore its horrors. Here is a game that might make you cringe in new ways, or you may just laugh it off like the cartoon deaths in the likes of Grand Theft Auto. Here's a game the ESRB *should* be tracking, because it actually contains an element of power in its nastiness. This is the stuff you might feel and walk away from impacted, and I mean that as a compliment.

Brady Fiechter

> "…he chases after her apparition through their old apartment, which looks about as inviting as an evening in hell."

The Suffering: Ties That Bind

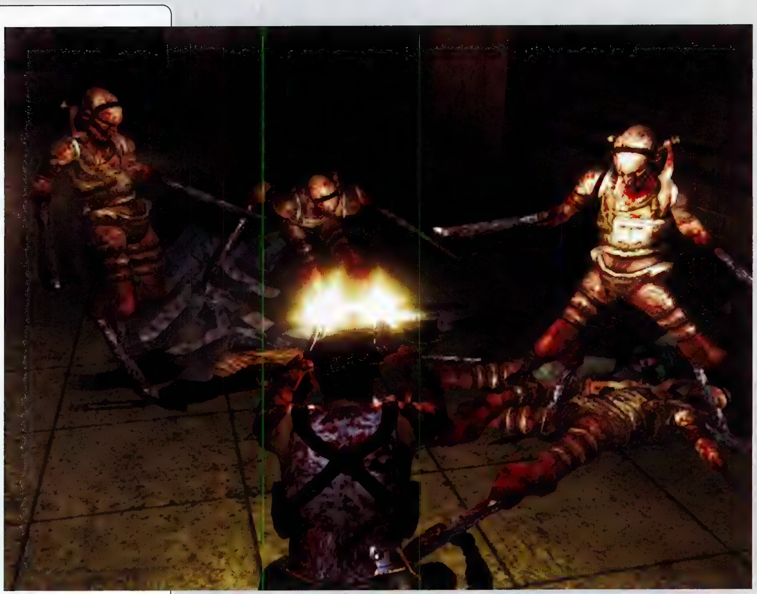
Preview

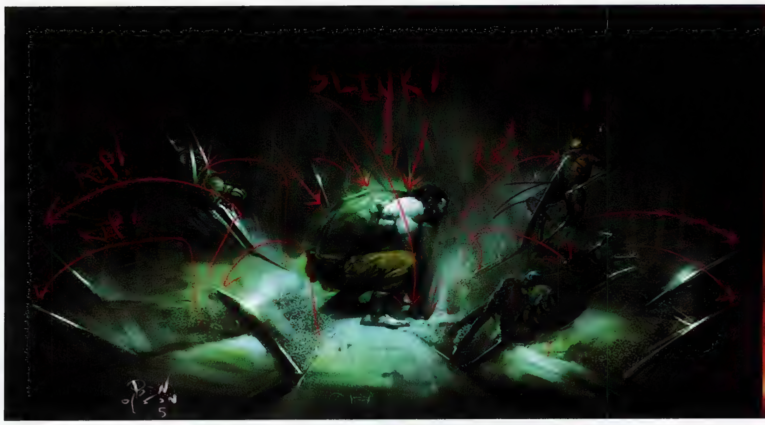
PlayStation 2, Xbox, PC

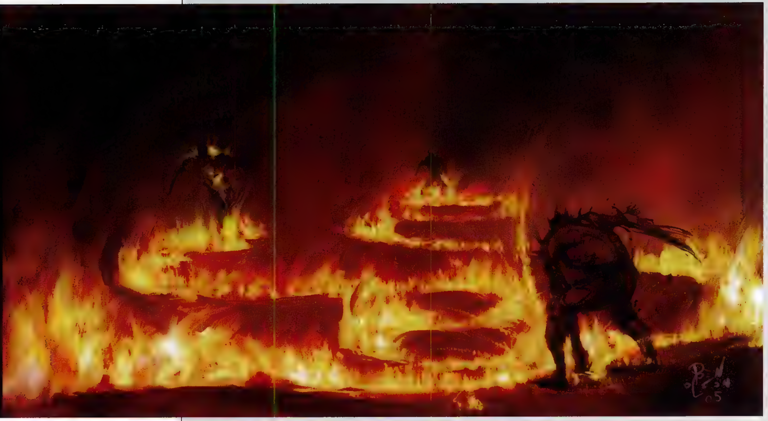
Point of Interest

In the original game, the setting was contained in a prison.

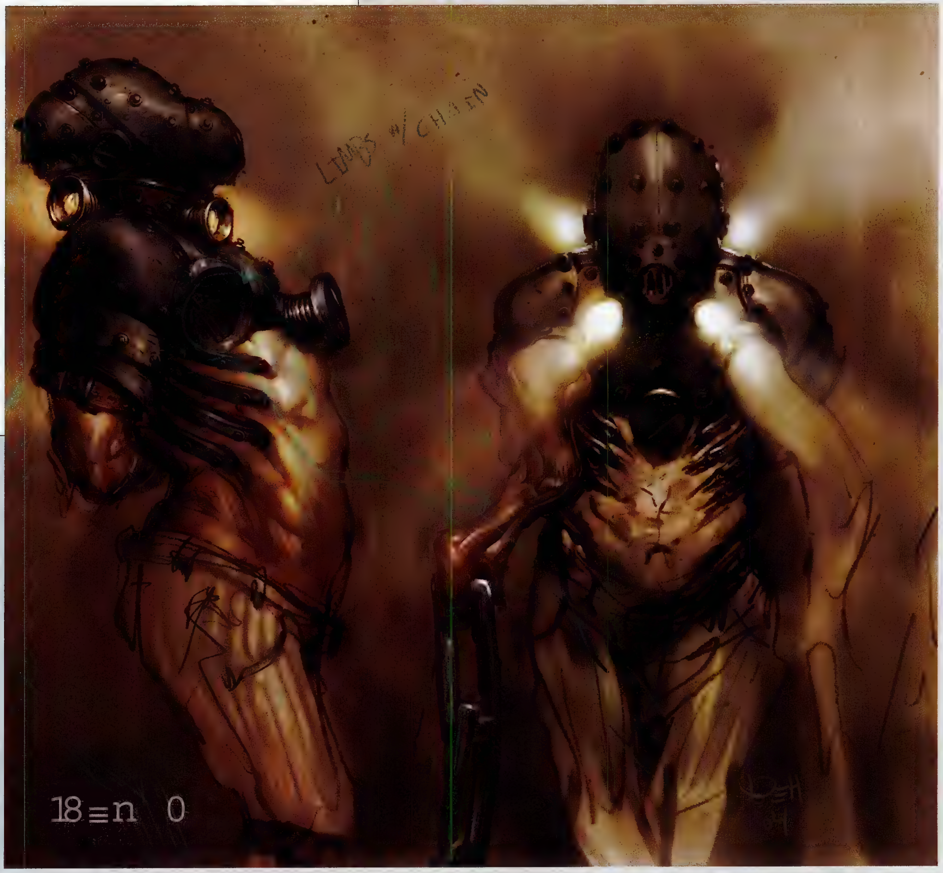
Developer: Surreal Software **Publisher:** Midway
Online: None **Available:** September







The more you kill, the more blood-soaked Torque gets.



SERIOUS SAM 2

Kicking ass the Sam way

Back in 1993, a group of Croatian game enthusiasts got it in their blood that it was time to actually start making those same games they'd been passionately playing most of their entire lives. They banded together as Croteam, and the game they would eventually make would end up being a cult classic—but not before a little hard work and clever ingenuity (and a few years of making soccer games for Amiga systems). Croteam decided to build a proprietary engine and entire game from scratch, and, in 2001, Serious Sam was born. Now, having retooled the series for another brand-new platform of technology, the team responsible for the original is bringing their oddball character back to the first-person shooter arena for their first full-blown sequel: Serious Sam II.

It has indeed been a while, so no surprises if you're a fan and are instantly thrilled with the new makeover. Characters pack 100 times the detail, the settings are much more varied and intricate, the enemy count is even higher; Croteam's goal is to set a record with most enemies onscreen in a game at once.

Dispatching that much resistance comes down to a variety of core weapons that feel pretty much like most weapons you find in the genre, but their visual depictions are vintage Sam. You've got the updated BoneSlasher, which is essentially a giant spinning blade of death, perfect for smaller packs of enemies. You've got

Live Bacons
Live Bacons
Just Shoot It

> "Characters pack 100 times the detail, the settings are much more varied and intricate, the enemy count is even higher…"

Ugly new faces, along with ugly old ones, show up to be mutilated by an assortment of weapons.

the assortment of shotguns and minis, grenade launchers and sniper rifles, like the RAPTOR 2. You've got Serious UZI Suzzi, the "gang banger weapon of choice." And, of course, the cruel but undeniably deadly Cadadoos Vulgaris, a Simban long-range device that dispatches a parrot, who has been infected by what is known as the Wuuka-chaka, which ignites the bird's intestines, turning it into a flying explosive. It should be noted that parrots comprise most of the life on the planet you are annihilating, M'digbo.

True to the series, Serious Sam II maintains a breathless urgency to its action. There's no stopping for breaks or exploration, no hide-and-seek shootouts with enemies strategizing in the bushes. Wave after wave of enemies maniacally charge your way, often materializing out of thin air to add to the thick blanket of fire. This is the game beyond most that deserves the simple description: shoot stuff. You'll also get to shoot stuff while tearing up terrain in vehicles, armed with what you'd expect vehicles in a first-person shooter to be armed with, and you'll also command some nifty little objects like the rolling sphere of death, which rolls around on momentum, crushing anything in its path.

If I had to get inside the heads of Croteam, I'd guess they were inspired by classic action games like space shooters, where frenetic onscreen chaos relentlessly charged your adrenaline as you picked through the patterns, removing every little piece of resistance stacked on the screen. This is the kind of game that makes sense for two-player; while not yet implemented, an online co-op mode will indeed be featured. The likes of Pong-Kong and the Junkyard need to be annihilated in the company of a friend. Brady Fiechter

Serious Sam 2

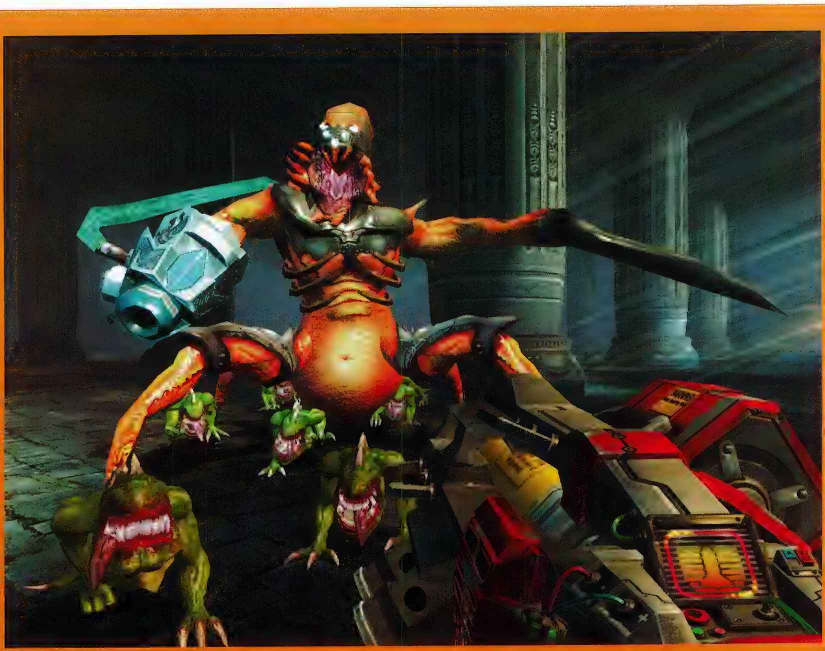
Xbox, PC

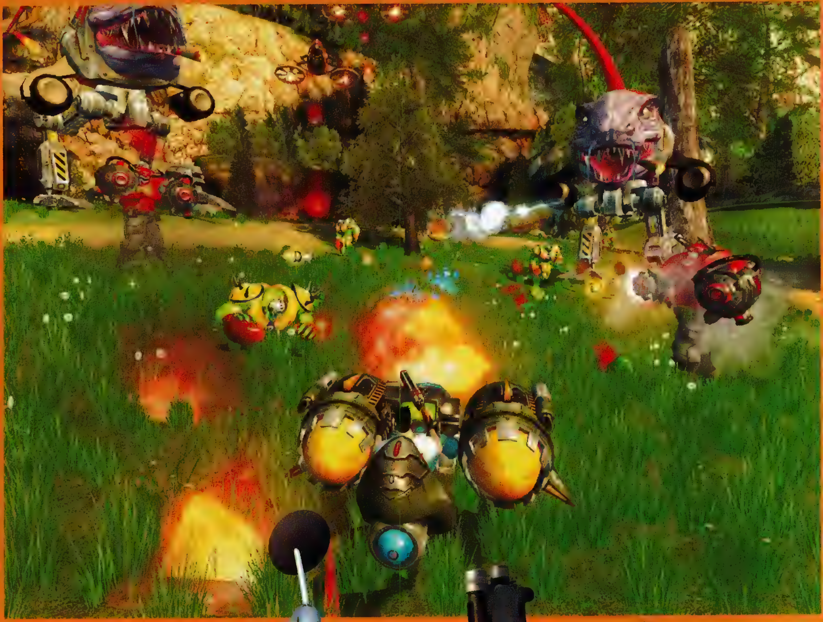
Preview

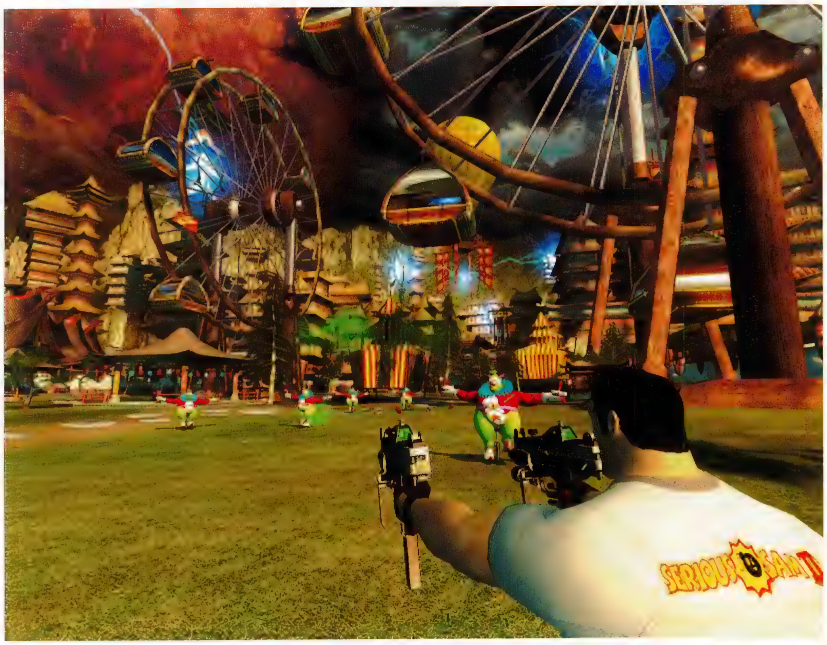
Point of Interest

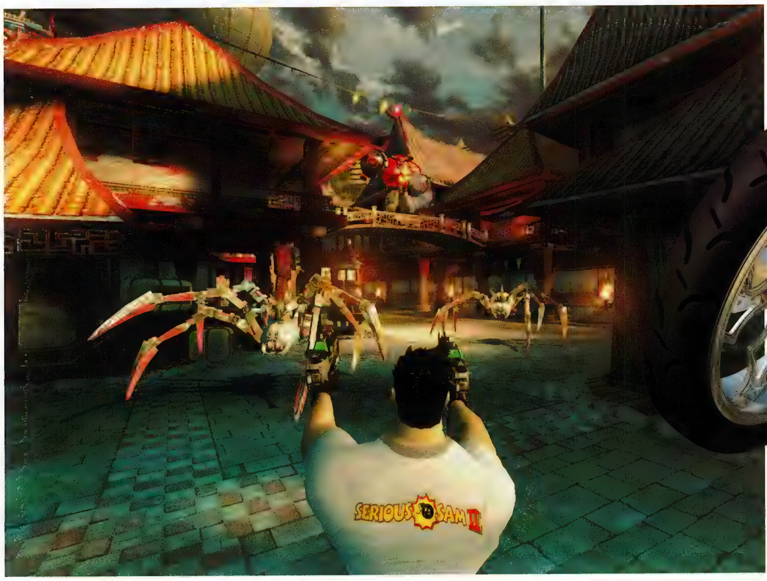
Croteam was not involved with the previous Sam game, Serious Sam: Next Encounter on GameCube.

Developer: Croteam **Publisher:** 2K Games
Online: 2p co-op, other TBA **Available:** Fall









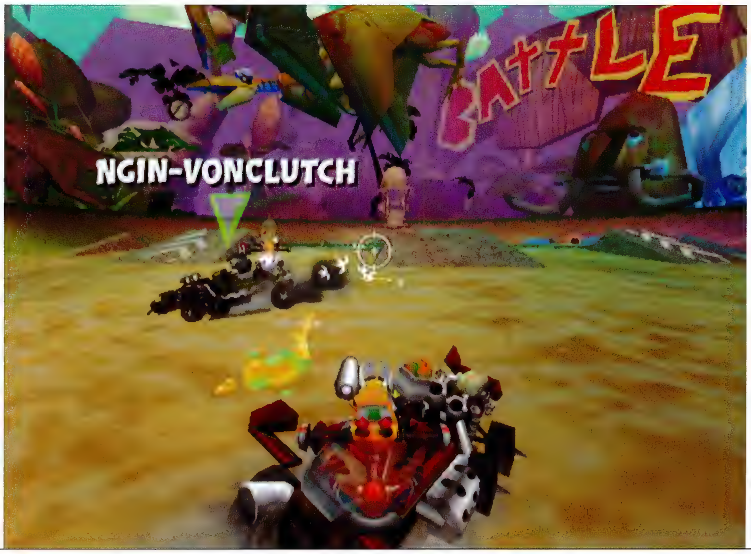
HAPPILY EVER
FASTER

CRASH TAG TEAM RACING

Big bandicoot bonanza

The current kart-racing picture couldn't be any more ironic. Just as Naughty Dog is set to release its first kart game based on the franchise they birthed post Crash (Jak X, see preview, page 47), Radical Entertainment is taking their first kick at the Crash can with the third kart iteration of Naughty Dog's seminal critter, the bandicoot heard 'round the world. For their part, Radical is intent on no less than changing the face of kart racing-kind by injecting elements of action, adventure, exploration and a deafening array of bells and whistles, then rumor has it they'll begin the business of taking over the franchise's development duties altogether, which points to a next-generation Bandicoot… Phew; one down, a handful to go.

Rather than the usual hub-to-hub win-and-move-on scenario, CTTR unfolds among a massive theme park housing five enormous zones, each a platforming cornucopia in its own right, filled with minigames, hidden areas, curious characters, park employees to bestir and, of course, kart races…of the new and improved kind. The goal in each zone is to collect enough power crystals to open up adjoining worlds (and ultimately beat the game), but how you go about it is entirely your business. You can find them, buy them or win them in a myriad of different ways, all the while embarking on character-specific missions to outfit your ever-burgeoning driver pool, augment your trusty bandicoot's wardrobe, and unlock new upgrades, cars, levels and so forth. Call it a platforming, stunt, action, adventure, shooting racer; there's even a story—told in bold parody by a couple of *Sports Center*-like talking chickens—which, among other things, introduces a fitting



new freak of a villain to the ensemble: Von Clutch, a deranged genius and altogether squatty green cyborg. He and Neo Cortex really should get together.

Once on the track, things really get interesting. You've got your power ups… your Mario Kart-inspired powerslide, jumps, shortcuts, thematic peril, et cetera…but also Radical's contribution to kart racing kind: Clashing, which allows you to morph with any vehicle in the immediate vicinity and man the turret while the driver you possessed does the steering. Getting cheaped on the last lap of the race? Hang back and Clash with second place, blow third place to holy hell, and dump your morph using the slight added boost to jettison to victory…or grab a blocking power-up and shake off your pursuer's incoming fire altogether. The tracks themselves are cleverly (if not diabolically) designed in league with each world and house five modes a piece—Crashinator, Rolling Thunder, Run and Gun, Fast Lap and, of course, Race—on top of each themed world being littered with cool minigames and Stunt and Battle arena challenges and puzzles, so boredom is never an option.

What I like most about CTTR, although the racing is crazy fun, is the *Wacky Racers*-meets-Motor Toon vibe I'm getting, coupled with a brain-tickling soundtrack in line with Twinsanity's (great game…go get it), along with some of the finest cracked actors and dialogue money can buy. CTTR is actually funny, although once again Cortex steals the show.

The sheer amount of content on tap here is humbling, and the freedom afforded by exploring the park and taking on missions makes CTTR so much more than I ever expected. There are a few flies buzzing around the ointment—the action bits need some tightening up and Crash's look and feel need adjustment—but If Radical can torque all the bolts, we may be looking at the high-water mark for kart-racing kind.

Dave Halverson

"Call it a platforming, stunt, action, adventure, shooting racer; there's even a story…"

Extracurricular activities abound...

Crash Tag Team Racing

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube

Preview

Point of Interest

Crash Bandicoot is the most popular and best-selling U.S. developed franchise ever in Japan, where he remains beloved.

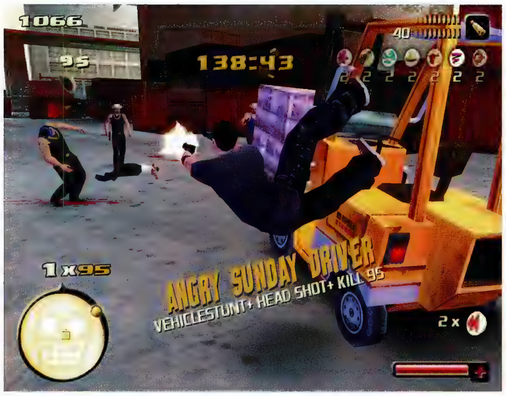
Developer: Radical Entertainment **Publisher:** VU Games
Online: None **Available:** October

Total Overdose

PlayStation 2, Xbox, PC

Developer: Deadline Games **Publisher:** SCi/Eidos **Available:** November 2005

The recipe for Total Overdose is as follows: Mix even parts of evil drug cartels, a crazy, revenge-minded gunslinger, Max Payne, a hot night in Tijuana and lots of tequila. Adding to its wackiness are “spicy combos,” flashing signs like “Burnination!” when you light a foe on fire and “loco powers,” in which you’re given items that beat down multiple enemies at a time (exploding piñatas, anyone?). Bullet-time is something you pretty much have indefinitely, and the gameplay is enough to keep you interested in the typical cartel- kills-father, son-gets-revenge storyline. I don’t know about you, but any game containing a “sombrero of death” is a-OK in my book. **Ashley Esqueda**

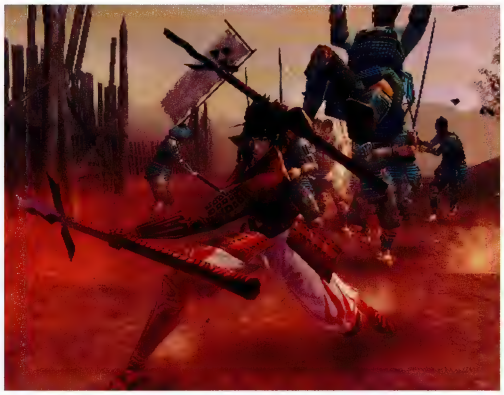


Devil Kings

PlayStation 2

Developer: Capcom **Publisher:** Capcom **Available:** October

Despite the similarity in title and logo, Capcom’s Devil Kings has nothing to do with Devil May Cry. Actually, that’s not entirely true, as Devil Kings also uses a stylish mix of swords and gunplay as its catalyst for action, but in terms of gameplay, Kings is more like Dynasty Warriors, complete with multiple playable characters, gauge-draining super attacks, a map showing troop movements and a counter for the hundreds of enemies you’ll slay. Just think medieval fantasy meets the occult instead of ancient China (and smoother control and more moves) and you’ll have a pretty good idea. **Chris Hoffman**

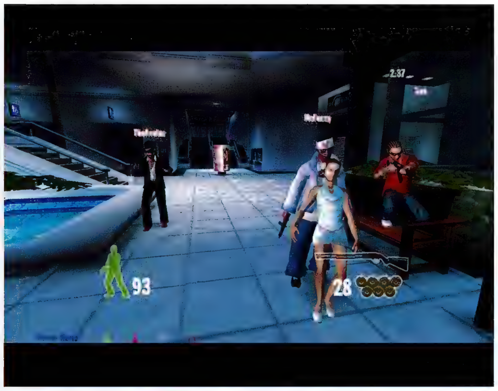


25 to Life

PlayStation 2, Xbox, PC

Developer: Avalanche Software **Publisher:** Eidos Interactive **Available:** October

Where do I begin with 25 to Life? At first I wasn’t convinced…but Avalanche has proven that they’re not messing around. Their online multiplayer is gearing up to be seriously hardcore…fight as a thug and live out those homicidal tendencies you have, or fight as a cop, and not only take out thugs, but also protect the innocent lives of civilians. Balancing each side is definitely a challenge, but if it’s pulled off correctly we’re going to see a game that could kick-start the genre’s online arena. Coupled with a decent single-player mode (there’s a few technical kinks that need to be smoothed over), 25 to Life is ready to jump on the GTA bandwagon. **Ashley Esqueda**

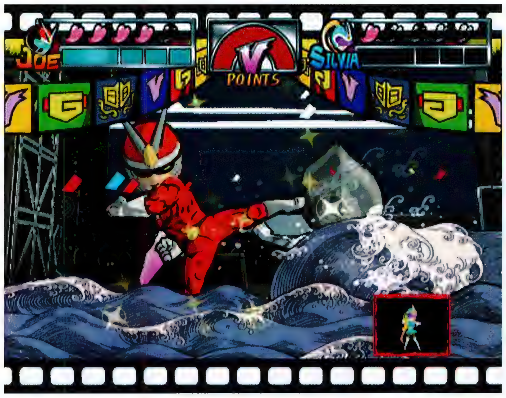


Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble

Gamecube, PSP

Developer: Clover Studios **Publisher:** Capcom **Available:** Fall

Formerly called Viewtiful Joe: VFX Battles, Red Hot Rumble is something like a mix between Viewtiful Joe and Super Smash Bros. Up to four characters (including Joe, Sylvia, Captain Blue Junior and others from the anime) battle in each scene, but instead of engaging in direct combat, they compete by collecting coins in various events, such as grabbing icons, beating up enemies as they appear, capturing the flag or pounding on bosses. Of course, you can use your fists, special moves and VFX powers (slow-mo, mach speed) to smack around the other combatants and give yourself the edge. **Chris Hoffman**

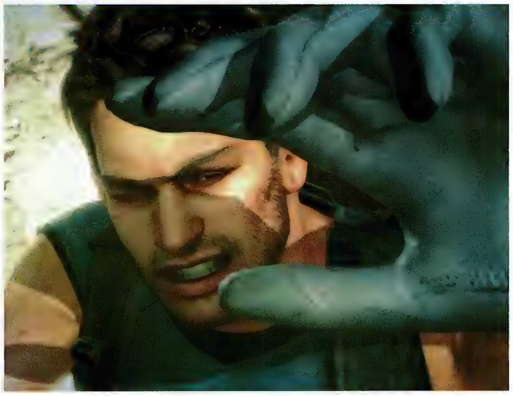


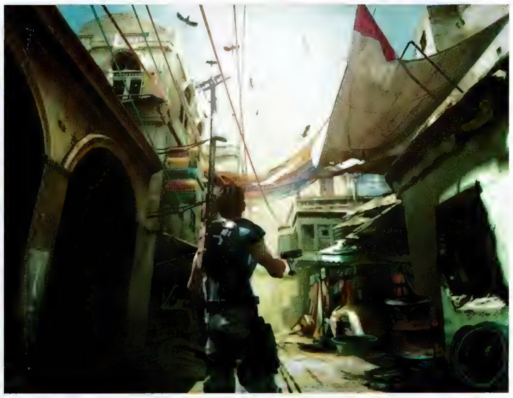
Resident Evil 5

Xbox 360, PlayStation 3

Developer: Capcom **Publisher:** Capcom **Available:** TBA

It’s now official: Resident Evil 5 is coming to Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3. (Other platforms, like Revolution, are still to be determined.) Continuing the trend of innovating the franchise, RE5 has a theme of “escape” at its core, and although Capcom hasn’t actually revealed any other specifics, they promise it will offer “an unbelievable level of detail, realism and control,” and judging by these astounding screens, we believe them. Of course, considering how things go with RE development, this stuff could all wind up on the cutting room floor when all is said and done, but we still couldn’t be more elated. **Chris Hoffman**



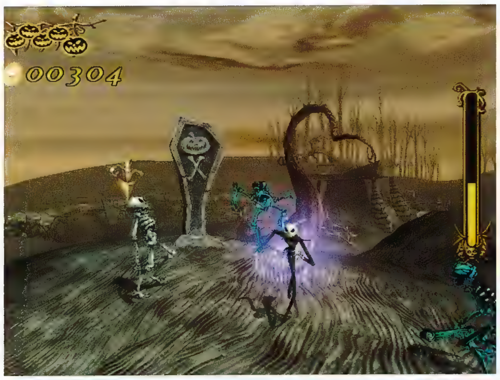


Nightmare Before Christmas: Oogie's Revenge

PlayStation 2, Xbox

Developer: Capcom Studio 3 **Publisher:** Buena Vista Games **Available:** October

After almost two years of ogling it at various trade shows, we've finally wrapped our hands around the latest version of Capcom/BVG's Nightmare Before Christmas and are happy to report there's a good chance it will live up to the namesake...along with a slight chance that it won't…the main challenge for the developers being overcoming proximity problems among detailed fixed environments. The inability to turn the camera certainly makes for a pretty game, but distinguishing pathways amidst complex layers of architecture is, for the moment, a little scary. We remain optimistic. **Dave Halverson**

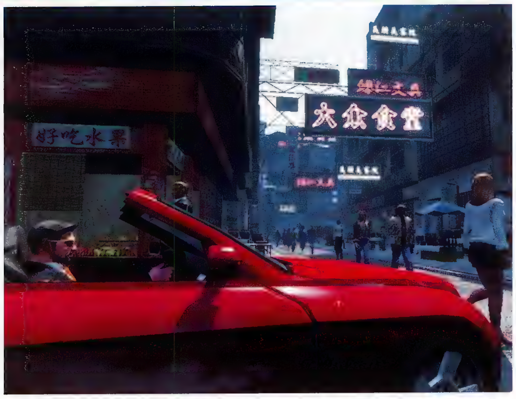


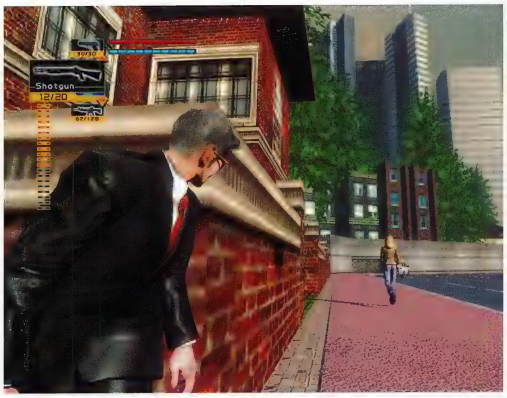
Frame City Killer

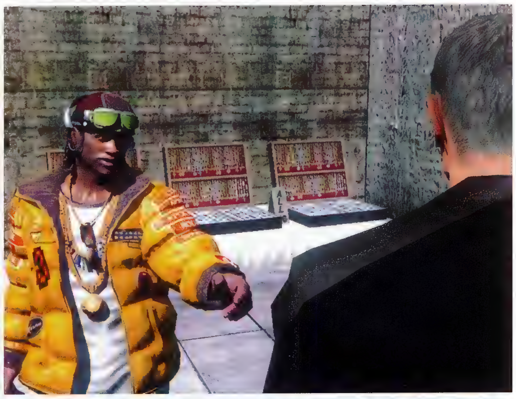
Xbox 360

Developer: Namco **Publisher:** Namco **Available:** Holiday '05

Namco's initial 360 bid, Frame City Killer (powered by the Unreal Engine 3 to assure immensely detailed non-linear environments), casts players as Crow, an assassin sent to…Frame City of course, to eliminate Kahn—dramatic pause for Shatner moment—an all around bad-guy terrorist/new-age drug cartel boss. Of course, that means tracking plenty of cronies along the way, playing hitman in a futuristic East Asian city where car chases and more lay in wait…but no happy endings…that we know of. **Dave Halverson**





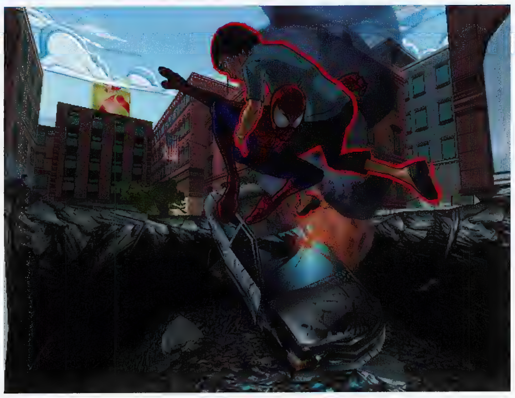


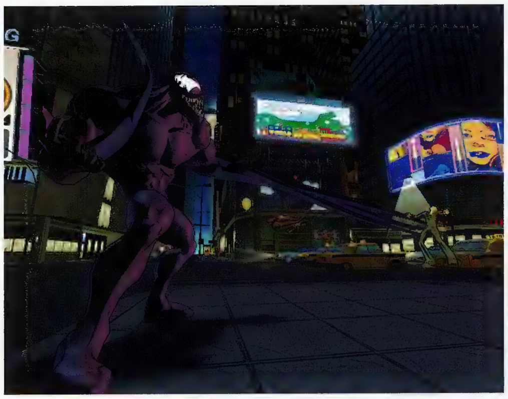
Ultimate Spider-Man

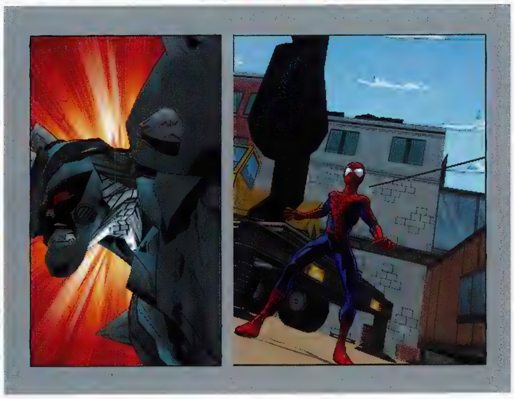
PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube

Developer: Treyarch **Publisher:** Activision **Available:** September

Ultimate Spider-Man, based on the alternate continuity from the comic book of the same name, gives players two choices: play as Spider-Man, swinging through the New York skyline, rescuing innocents, beating up criminals, fighting villains like Rhino and Green Goblin, or play as Venom, hurling cars, busting up fire hydrants, leaping through the city and feeding on hapless citizens to satiate your ever-hungry parasitic suit. Either way, you'll be treated to some very nice cel-shaded graphics, tremendous comic book-style presentation and a huge, open game world filled with story missions and optional side-quests. **Chris Hoffman**





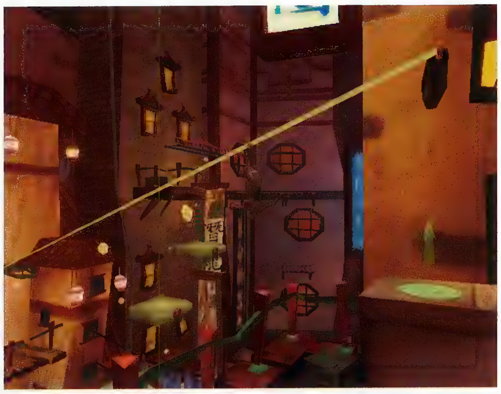


Scooby Doo Unmasked

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GC

Developer: A2M **Publisher:** THQ **Available:** September

Montréal-based Artificial Mind and Movement (Jersey Devil, Monsters Inc., Scaler, The Grinch) have been at the action-platform game for a very long time and continue to improve with each passing game; Scooby Doo Unmasked is looking to be their best yet. A more charming, true-to-the-source-material platformer you will not find, and the game is filled with endemic nods to the cast, including TV's Adam West as villain Winslow Stanton… Velma uses Scooby's findings to solve riddles; Shaggy combines found ingredients to cook up additional HP, etc., all within extremely well-devised, -colored and -textured worlds, and to a surprisingly wonderful score. **Dave Halverson**

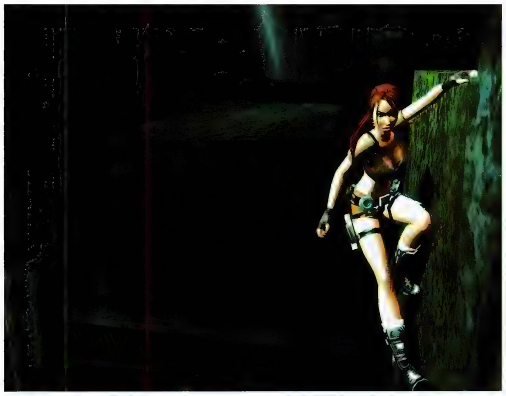


Tomb Raider: Legend

PlayStation 2, Xbox

Developer: Crystal Dynamics **Publisher:** Eidos **Available:** March 2006

The more we see of the new Tomb Raider, the more excited we get. There's simply no denying that Crystal Dynamics is pulling out every last stop for their debut as Ms. Croft's benefactors with series creator Toby Gard directly in charge of Lara's new visage. They certainly don't want to rush this one to market, as a single rough spot would surely bring about the end of days. We're assured a new cast of characters that will carry on throughout her next-gen adventures, a return to an emphasis on action and a much more "human" Lara as we bid farewell to her double Ds and welcome a more, shall we say, streamlined object of affection. **Dave Halverson**

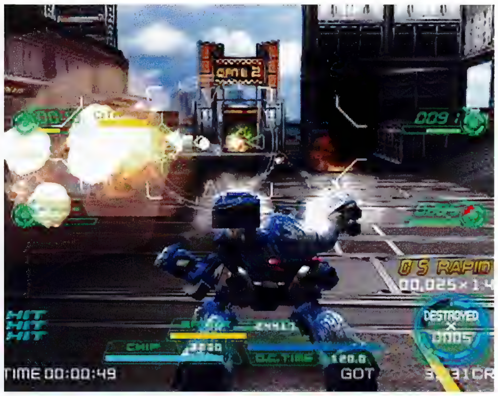


S.L.A.I: Steel Lancer Arena International

PlayStation 2

Developer: Genki **Publisher:** Konami **Available:** September

S.L.A.I. takes players into a world of virtual mech combat—and we're not talkin' big, slow, clunky mechs either. We're talking lightning-quick, dual-analog bot-on-bot action where the combatants utilize missiles, machine guns, grenades, lasers—even chainsaws and more—from four weapons slots, then soar away or slip into stealth mode to hunt down their next adversary in the name of fame and fortune. Dozens of body parts and modifications are available for your "scoot vehicle" mech, which you can use to climb the ranks in seven cyber-arenas around the globe or take online in four-player versus combat. **Chris Hoffman**

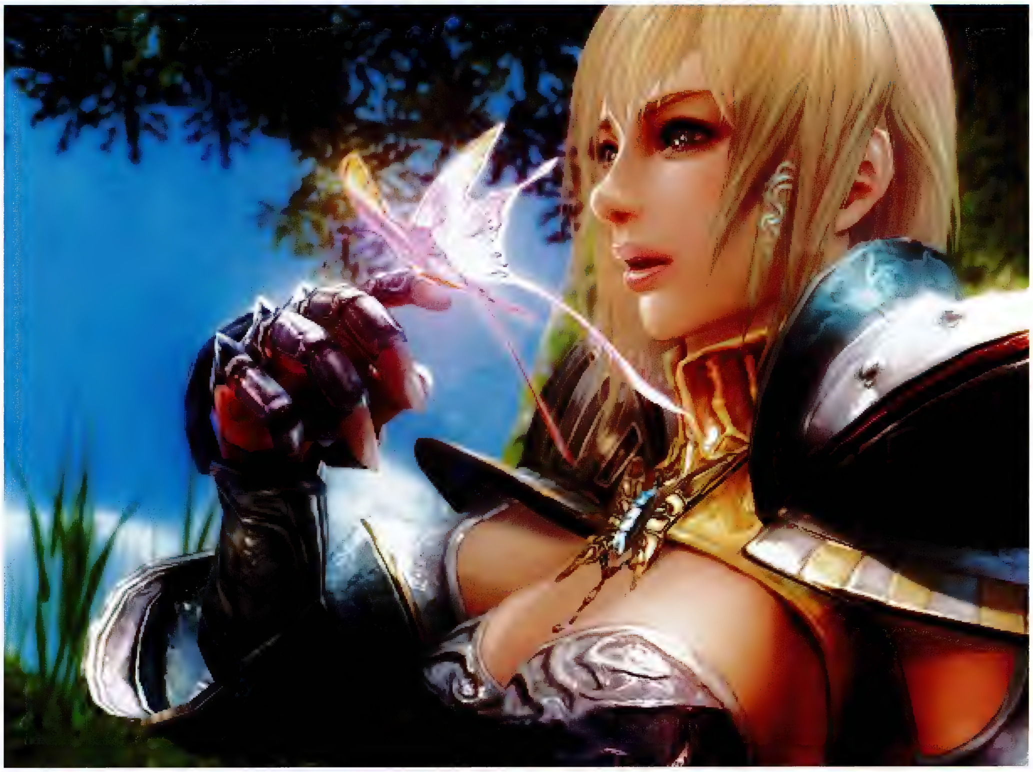


Endless Saga

PlayStation 3, PC

Developer: Webzen (D-Studio) **Publisher:** Webzen **Available:** 2007

Webzen wowed the crowd at the PlayStation Meeting event in Japan with their newest MMO announcement: the stunning Endless Saga, slated for 2007 on PS3 and PC. The incredibly crisp imagery being shown was purportedly taken from the PS3 version. It showed an elf-like female dressed in opulent armor sitting beneath a tree in a lavishly detailed forest area. Panning past a rippling lake, the scene follows an exotic butterfly towards the character. As you can see in the screen, the integrity of her model is unprecedented for a fantasy-themed MMO, from the complexity of her talisman and fingers to facial details like reflective and emotive eyes and soft, porous skin tones. With Webzen's D-Studio putting forth Endless Saga, their H-Studio preparing Huxley and the creator of Grand Theft Auto assembling APB…is there a more ambitious next-gen MMO developer? We think not. **Mike Griffin**



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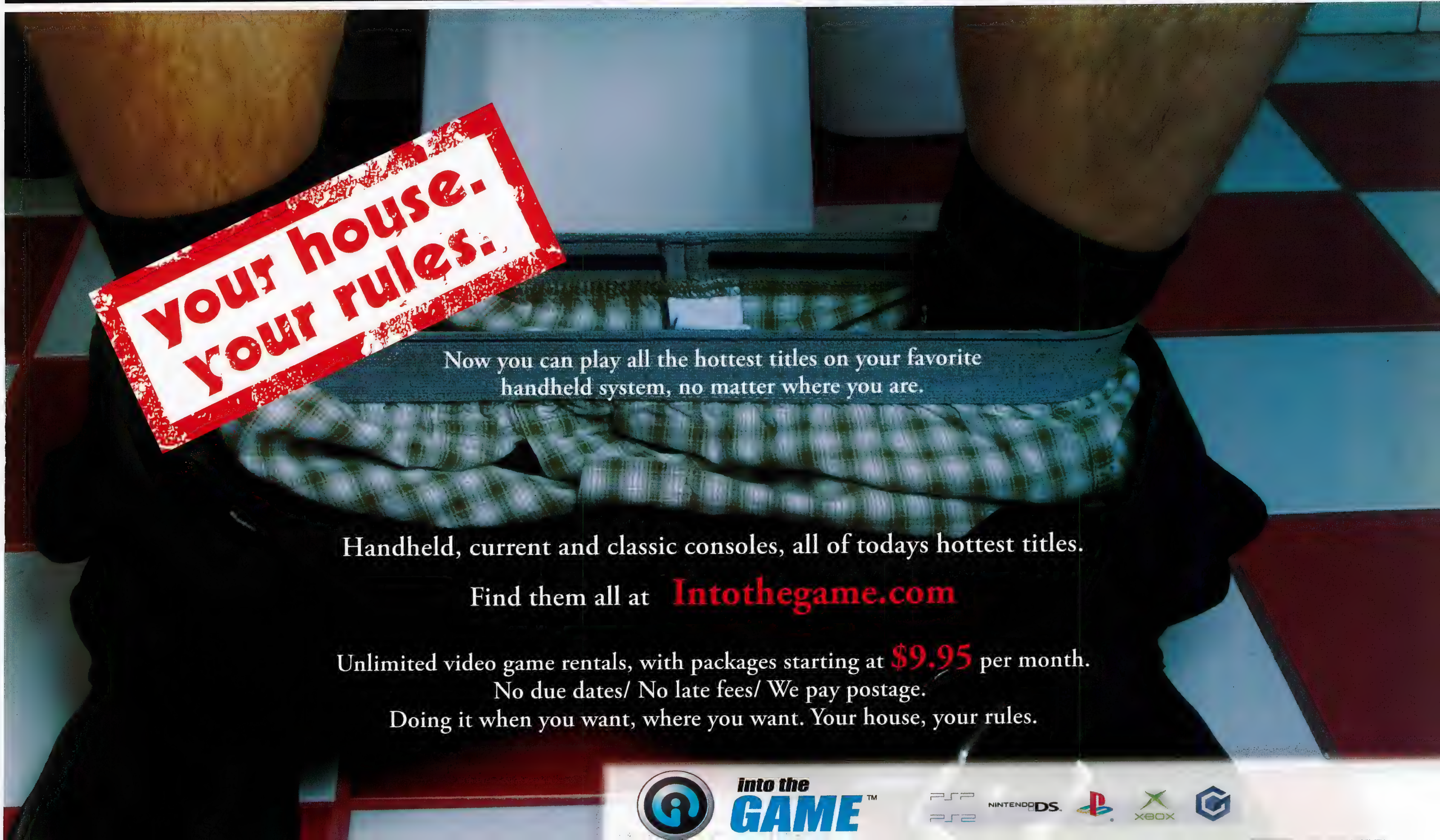

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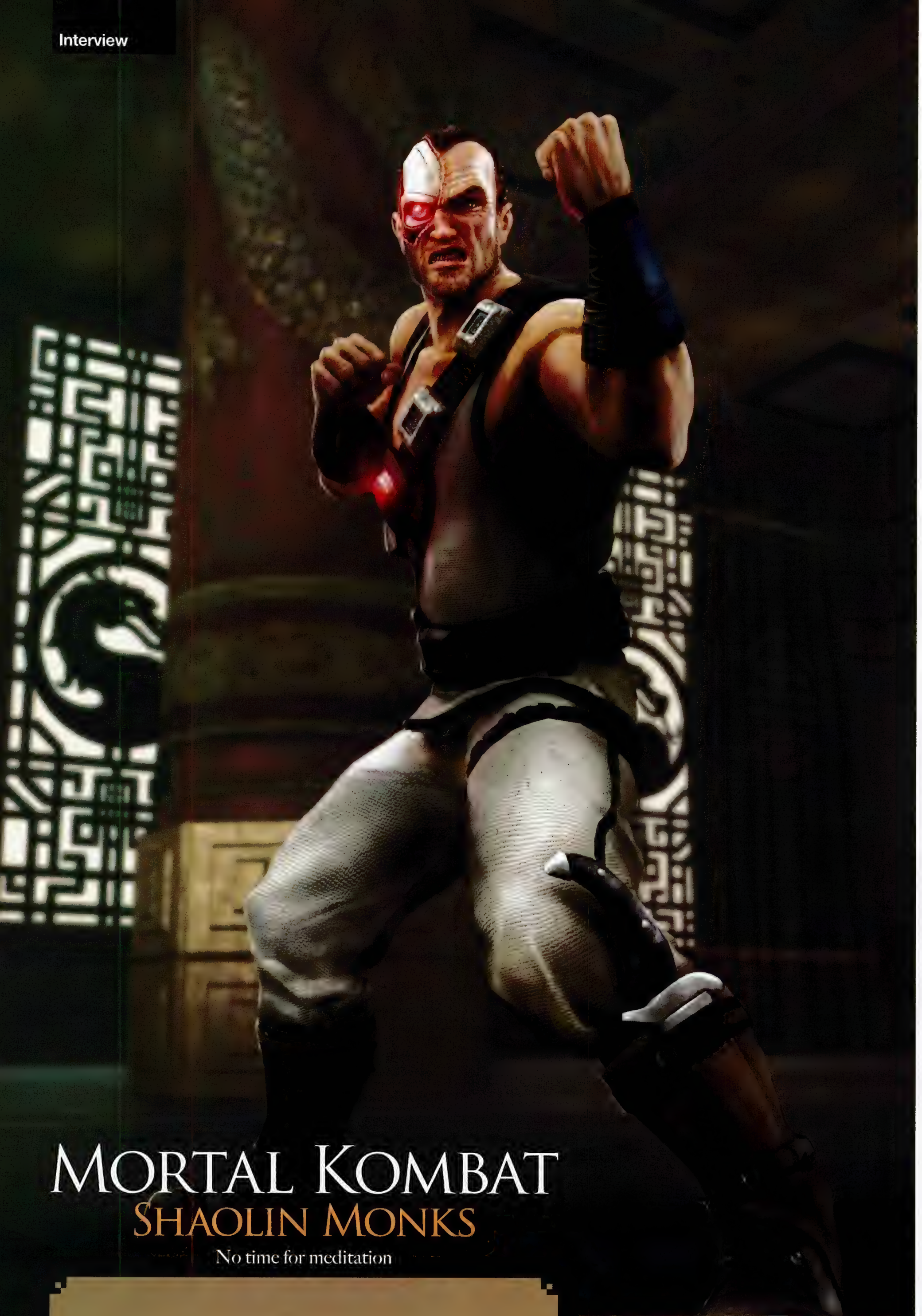


MORTAL KOMBAT
SHAOLIN MONKS

No time for meditation

Mortal Kombat has never been my cup of plasma. When it ruled the arcades, I was into Street Fighter; when it hit 16-bit console, I was all about Killer Instinct; when it went action I took a pass; and by the time it went 3D I didn't care. I've always liked the characters and universe for their so-over-the-top-you-can't-see-the-summit mystique, demon babes and ketchup-spurting blood, but until now I was never a bona fide fan. As an action-adventure junkie, there's no disrespecting what Paradox is accomplishing with Shaolin Monks, a brutal fighting-platforming-action epic host to perfect control, rubbery good animation and some seriously off-the-hook play mechanics. Forgetting for a second that I just uttered the phrase "off-the-hook," I pledged my allegiance to the game last issue. Here's my follow-up interview with creative director (for all Mortal Kombat games) Ed Boon, producer Shaun Himmerick, lead designer Adam Puhl and audio designer (for Shaolin Monks and all past Mortal Kombat games) Dan Forden. Dave Halverson

Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks Preview

PlayStation 2, Xbox

Point of Interest

One of the stars of Shaolin Monks, Liu Kang, was killed off in MK: Deadly Alliance, but resurrected in MK: Deception.

Developer: Midway LA (Paradox) **Publisher:** Midway
Online: None **Available:** Fall

INTERVIEW

ED BOON creative director
SHAUN HIMMERICK producer
ADAM PUHL lead designer
DAN FORDEN audio designer

play: Can Shao Kahn ever truly be defeated? I thought he was toast...
Ed Boon: This game takes place during the period of Mortal Kombat II, so Shao Kahn was at the top of his game at the time. Can he ever truly be defeated? I would say yes, nobody is completely indestructible. You might remember that Shao Kahn was defeated by the Deadly Alliance of Shang Tsung and Quan Chi. But for now, in Shaolin Monks, Shao Kahn rules all!

I must commend you on the extraordinary precision with which these characters control. Was bringing fighting game precision to the action adventure format a main goal?
Shaun Himmerick: When we set out to make a Mortal Kombat game, we had to make sure we had the deepest fighting engine of any adventure game out there. What we created is our Multi-Directional Kombat System. This system links seamlessly with all of the platforming abilities to perform moves and combos, but also opens up fighting for the player. We have given the player the ability to attack in any direction at any time and link all of those moves together seamlessly. The player can choose to loft an enemy into the air and either attack another enemy on the ground, or the player can choose to jump into the air and follow that enemy and continue their combo in the air. The player is in complete control. We wanted to give the player the most freedom and the most options of any adventure game out there.

Are the characters all dynamic to the terrain where feet adjust to the angles of the environment, etc.?
Adam Puhl: We had this feature on for a period of time but turned it off partially through the project. Most of our environments have a level floor to keep gameplay consistent while fighting. It also helps keep the game running at a smooth 60 frames per second without this feature on. We focused on smooth solid fighting and better gameplay than these small features.

The last two attempts at expanding the MK franchise fell well short of expectations. What finally clicked?
Boon: I think the main difference between the previous two MK action games was the development teams. Shaolin Monks was developed by a completely different team.

I really like the environmental traps and obstacles in the game's early stages. Does this carry through and build throughout? Nothing like skewering a guy to a catapult and watching him soar like a big, dead projectile.
Puhl: Exactly. We decided early on that the gameplay was going to be action-oriented. This meant that all aspects of the game support the fighting system. All our puzzles involve combat in one form or another. So finding the right catapult will allow you to skewer an enemy and hurl his body into a barricade, causing the barricade to explode and clear your path. Whether it be catapults, living trees, pit spikes, or acid—if it looks dangerous, you can use it. There will always be a

new trap around the corner to knock enemies into. Just keep your eyes open; you never know when a trap could lead to something more.

In fact, you've managed to convey all of the elements of the fighting franchise and then some, working in special moves, juggles, fatalities and environmental kills. Aside from the staples, anything all-new in here we should be looking for?
Himmerick: Well, we mentioned earlier about the Multi-Directional Kombat System, which expands on head-to-head fighting by opening up the option of any direction at any time to deal with multiple enemies at once, and also opens up combat in the air to the player. The player is in complete control with all sorts of options at their disposal. The player chooses if they want to throw an enemy away, toss them into the air, slam down a powerful attack on them or leverage one of many super moves in any direction at any time.

But we don't just have these MK things in the game; we made them upgradeable. The player can upgrade Liu Kang's fireballs to include multiple fireballs and be able to throw fireballs while in the air, for example. Also, Kung Lao can upgrade to many options with the hat throw, each one more powerful than the last.

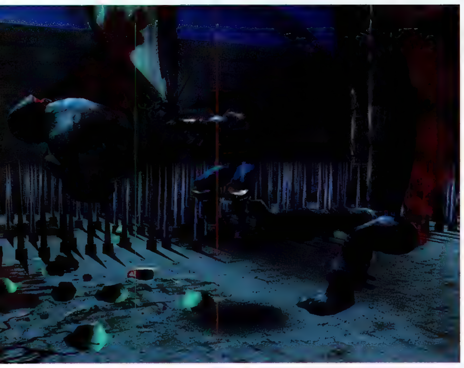
Additionally, we upgraded the fatality system. The player will gain the ability to perform Fatalities on multiple enemies called Multalities and finally also gain the ability to enter Brutality mode to unleash devastating damage.

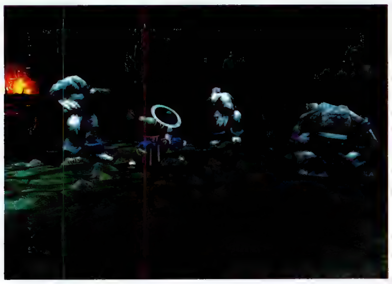
I noticed a fair amount of well-devised platforming early on as well. Does this also build and heighten?
Puhl: The platforming in the game does build as you progress, and it also adds to your combat abilities. For example, one of the first platform abilities you get is the long jump. This allows you to soar across the screen and over large gaps, but if you press an attack button while in the long jump, you will perform a spiraling dive kick that sends enemies flying back. As you progress through the game, you will obtain more platform abilities and you will need to use them more and more often, including using them directly with the Multi-Directional Kombat System.

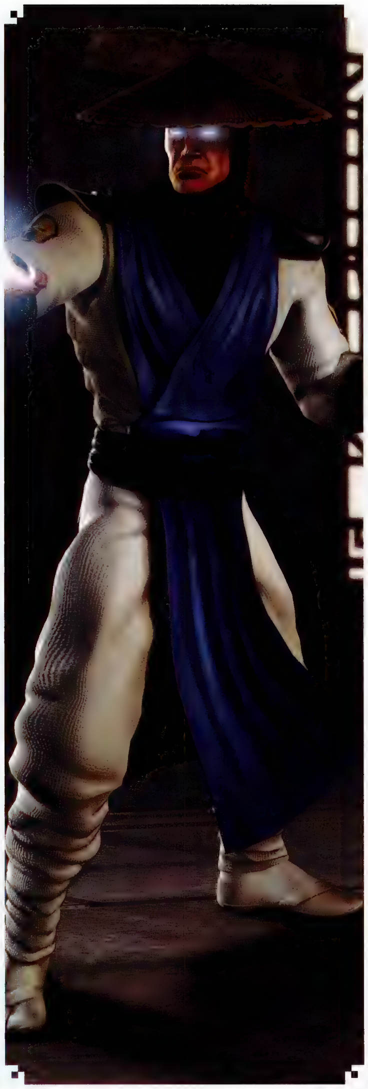
Would you say the game leans more towards fighting, platform-style adventure or evenly between both?
Himmerick: I call the game a fighting adventure game. We use the cool parts of platforming to our advantage and make sure that links smoothly into our fighting engine. We also use the fighting engine as a major part of our puzzle system. We hated adventure games

> "This game takes place during the period of Mortal Kombat II, so Shao Kahn was at the top of his game..."
> ED BOON creative director

It just wouldn't be Mortal Kombat without arterial spray...







Three (or more)-on-one exchanges are commonplace, but easily dispatched...

> "...we focused on explaining a lot of the details that were left out of the original MKII storyline."
>
> SHAUN HIMMERICK producer

that had a lot of pushing and pulling, or grab this thing and drag it over here. We wanted to keep the fast-paced fighting as the tool the player uses. So we have puzzles where you'll have to throw enemies through a wall to open new areas. It keeps the player active and uses the skills they already learned.

Speaking to the art, given the complexity and integrity of the models, how are you achieving so much detail in the environments, especially on PS2? Is this a completely new engine?
Himmerick: The rendering engine is completely different than the MK: Deception engine. With this being an adventure game instead of a traditional MK head-to-head fighter, we needed a completely different system. We set out to make the original 2D environments come to life in full 3D with all of the interactions and danger areas that you'd expect from an MK game.

The opening cinema looks fantastic. How much cinema is there throughout the game?
Himmerick: The opening movie is the final battle of the MK1 tournament. It is an awesome battle royale where we see Liu Kang defeat Shang Tsung. The rest of the game has around 45 minutes of story cutscenes where we focused on explaining a lot of the details that were left out of the original MKII storyline. We also wanted to make many of the secrets and rumors of MKII come to life in this game.

Will we encounter the gamut from Outworld? Met up with Baraka; Mileena can't be far behind...
Puhl: Definitely. We're elaborating on all the MK characters from MK1 and MK2. You'll find out how Baraka's Tarkatan army attacked the Wu-shi academy, as well as how Sonya was captured. As you explore Outworld, the Shaolin Monks will face boss battles against powerful foes such as Reptile or Kitana, Mileena and Jade at the same time. They will obtain aid from friends too; Johnny Cage, Jax and Raiden are just a few allies that will help the Monks in their journey.

We're given access to Liu Kang and Kung Lao from the outset, but noticed two characters lurking in the shadows. Presuming all of the characters are from the Earth Realm, would those be Sonya Blade and Johnny Cage? You gotta have Sonya in there...
Puhl: The unlockables aren't always what you expect. I'd hate to ruin the surprise of who is unlockable in the game. To maintain the tradition of MK games, we have put in a lot of great unlockables and reasons to keep coming back to explore Outworld in single player and co-op. We have put at least one unlockable, often times more, in every area of the game. We have also included game statistics in the pause menu to keep track of everything you have accomplished. So you will know when you have found every normal unlockable and hidden area in the game.

Does choosing Kung Lao as a main character point to Goro's (or his) demise? Will we be bidding one a farewell, or does this game take place before their rivalry comes to fruition?
Boon: Kung Lao as a main character does have some ties to Goro, but I wouldn't consider him as pointing to Goro's demise. Kung Lao's ancestor was killed by Goro, so I'm sure he has some motivation to settle the score. But remember, he is a Shaolin Monk, and revenge is not part of his agenda. You will have to play the game to see if we are going to bid one of them farewell. This game *is* the fruition of their rivalry.

After all these years, the MK namesake is still rock solid, even in the wake of a few mediocre games and films (first was cool; second, not so) along the way. What keeps the fan base so loyal?
Boon: MK fans are fiercely demanding, but also very loyal. Thankfully, we've been able to enjoy more recent success with Deadly Alliance and Deception. I believe the main contribution to MK still being successful is that we've always added something new and fun in each iteration. From multiple fighting styles to weapon combat to new modes of play, we've managed to keep things fresh. Now, with this completely new format of game, we are introducing perhaps the most dramatic new addition to MK.

What can we expect from the soundtrack? This being a full-fledged adventure, how will you change it up?
Dan Forden: The audio in Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks pays homage to the original sound design approach used in the Mortal Kombat II arcade game. There are some allusions to the music from that game, as well as some of the original sound effects. Since it's more of an adventure game, it has a variety of musical feels, from moody, spooky ambiences to tension-inducing premonitions of battle to full-on combat music. We also have a lot of very imaginative cinematic fatality sequences that are sure to entertain. **play**

Jak X

Combat Racing

Rolling thunder

While Crash is off gallivanting in his third "kart" iteration, Naughty Dog has been concocting a racing (Molotov) cocktail of their own that all but chews up and spits out the moniker altogether. If thoughts of Jak X gave you visions of scooting about Mario Kart-style, dispensing the usual assortment of booby traps and projectiles, here's a banana for your exhaust pipe: Jak X is a big, loud, explosive, balls-to-the-wall, kill-or-be-killed game of death on wheels—a lethal mixture of racing bits bolted together and then fed a steady diet of nitro…or in this case, Eco.

Getting underway, after basking in the jubilation of an opening movie created for people without the word "yo" in their vocabulary, set to Queens of the Stone Age (welcome to the no hip-hop zone), the opening scene sets the stage via yet another pristine ND cinematic (I'm pretty sure they're not from this planet). Haven City's resident ganglord, Krew, may be dead, but that hasn't stopped him from reaching beyond the grave, via hologram, at the reading of his will—arranged by his daughter who surprisingly doesn't look like a melted, talking zit—to solicit Jak and company to fulfill his last request and lifelong dream of winning the Crash City Grand Prix. Just to be sure, he's proposed a toast and spiked the wine with a deadly toxin (that Krew, such a kidder), offering up the antidote to the victor, and so, as they say, the race is on. Sony was kind enough to let me take Adventure Mode for a spin, and I'm still picking chunks of shrapnel out of my backside…

Revolving around four Cup Challenges (about the only thing standard-issue about Jak X), each event (okay, Cup) consists of a series of challenges spread across four massive zones—Iceland, Haven City, Kras City, Spargus—and a final GP location, each of which is host to a myriad of events including Deathrace, a skirmish

> "Prepare to lose a few races and be elated in the process. The best games make you work for it…"

The cinemas are absolutely second to none.

of destruction over speed (but go kicky fast); Circuit Race, your standard cart racing concern only kicked up about 100 notches; Freeze Rally, an exercise in hitting different colored icons to freeze the clock and improve your times; Artifact Race, a Twisted-Metal-meets-Jak-3 versus blitzkrieg; and Turbo Dash, as in chaining together turbos until your lips bludgeon your face. And be warned; any race involving Eco weapons is an exercise in offensive and defensive tactics. Krew gives you a fast car and plenty of artillery, but deployment is key—right shoulder weapons, left shoulder countermeasures—so all of you fellow Wipeout aces who carelessly discard weapons…don't even think about it. Combat is a major component in Jak X. Your pals are poisoned too, so they'll cheap you every chance they get, making multitasking a major part of the game. First place, aka the lead in this game, means squat. You wanna stay in front you better grab the countermeasures and know how to use 'em… Of course, grabbing the countermeasures often means missing the turbos, so, well, you get the gist. Prepare to lose a few races and be elated in the process. The best games make you work for it…and this is definitely one of the best. You're either dialed in like a brain surgeon or road kill. Proper allocation of your winnings doesn't hurt either—tuning your car's engine, gearbox, armor and turbo. And speaking of cars, these designs are simply amazing, as is the control, pacing and another oft-times overlooked and/or under-realized piece of the puzzle: the soundtrack, which, in racing, used to be king. Twenty-two songs worth of crunchy goodness composed specifically for the game by A Perfect Circle's Billy Howerdel—it just doesn't get much better than that. Start your engines. Dave Halverson

Jak X: Combat Racing

PlayStation 2

Preview

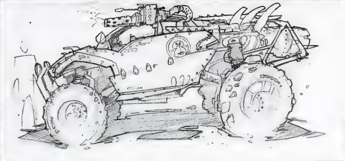
Point of Interest

Jak X will link up with Daxter on PSP to unlock secrets such as new characters, cars and decals.

Dev: Naughty Dog **Pub:** Sony Computer Entertainment America **Online:** 6p versus **Available:** October

INTERVIEW

Evan Wells
co-president
Naughty Dog



play: Is Jak X meant to bridge the gap between Jak 3 and the next game in the universe, or is this a final farewell?
Evan Wells: Jak 3 completed the Precursor Legacy Trilogy, which we started back in 2001, but it was not the end of the franchise. Jak X: Combat Racing is our first opportunity to demonstrate that our characters and universe can continue beyond the scope of the first trilogy. While I can't go into detail about what future games might be developed, I am sure that you will continue to see more of Jak and Daxter in years to come.

Was there a lot of discussion over whether to focus on traditional kart racing versus a full on multi-facetted vehicular assault?
Right from the start, we knew that Jak X: Combat Racing shouldn't be a traditional kart racer. We had been inspired by the vehicle gameplay that we had developed over the course of the first three games, and particularly the driving elements from Jak 3. The themes and tones of the previous games really dictated that a traditional kart racer would be inappropriate for the characters of this world.

I presume the choice was based on offering a diverse multiplayer experience. How many modes/ challenges make it to online?
Jak X: Combat Racing is the first online game that Naughty Dog has developed. It was important for us to make sure that the multiplayer aspects of the game offered players a huge amount of variety so that people could be playing this game for many years down the line. All of the modes available in the single-player adventure mode are also available in multiplayer and online modes. Just to give you a quick rundown, Jak X: Combat Racing will have 11 event types across 24 tracks and seven wide-open combat arenas. This creates a huge combination of event/venue pairings that keeps the game fresh and exciting.

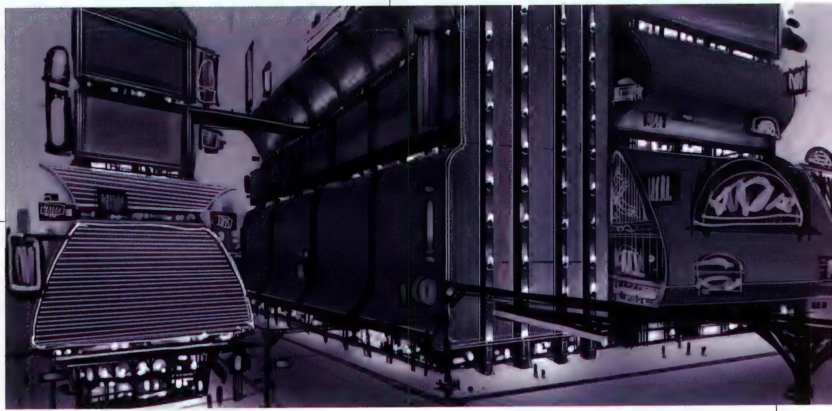
I see shades of many games in here…is X the result of combining the best elements from a myriad of your most highly regarded racing games?
We really wanted to make Jak X: Combat Racing the one-stop shop for all vehicular action. We wanted to capture the pure and simple adrenaline-pumping excitement of an arcade racer, the explosive carnage of a vehicle combat game, the personalization and customization of a racing sim and the come-from-behind, reversal-of-fortune experience of a kart racer. Wrap all of that up in the Jak and Daxter universe, throw in a humorous story, and you have Jak X: Combat Racing.

In Adventure mode, do we play as Jak the whole way through, or will there be an opportunity to choose teams?
The adventure mode focuses on Jak and his struggle to save his friends from an insidious plot set into motion by one of his past enemies. All of the favorite characters from the past (like Pecker, Ashelin and Sig) are present in the game as fellow racers, and teammates, but you will only get to drive as them in the multiplayer mode.

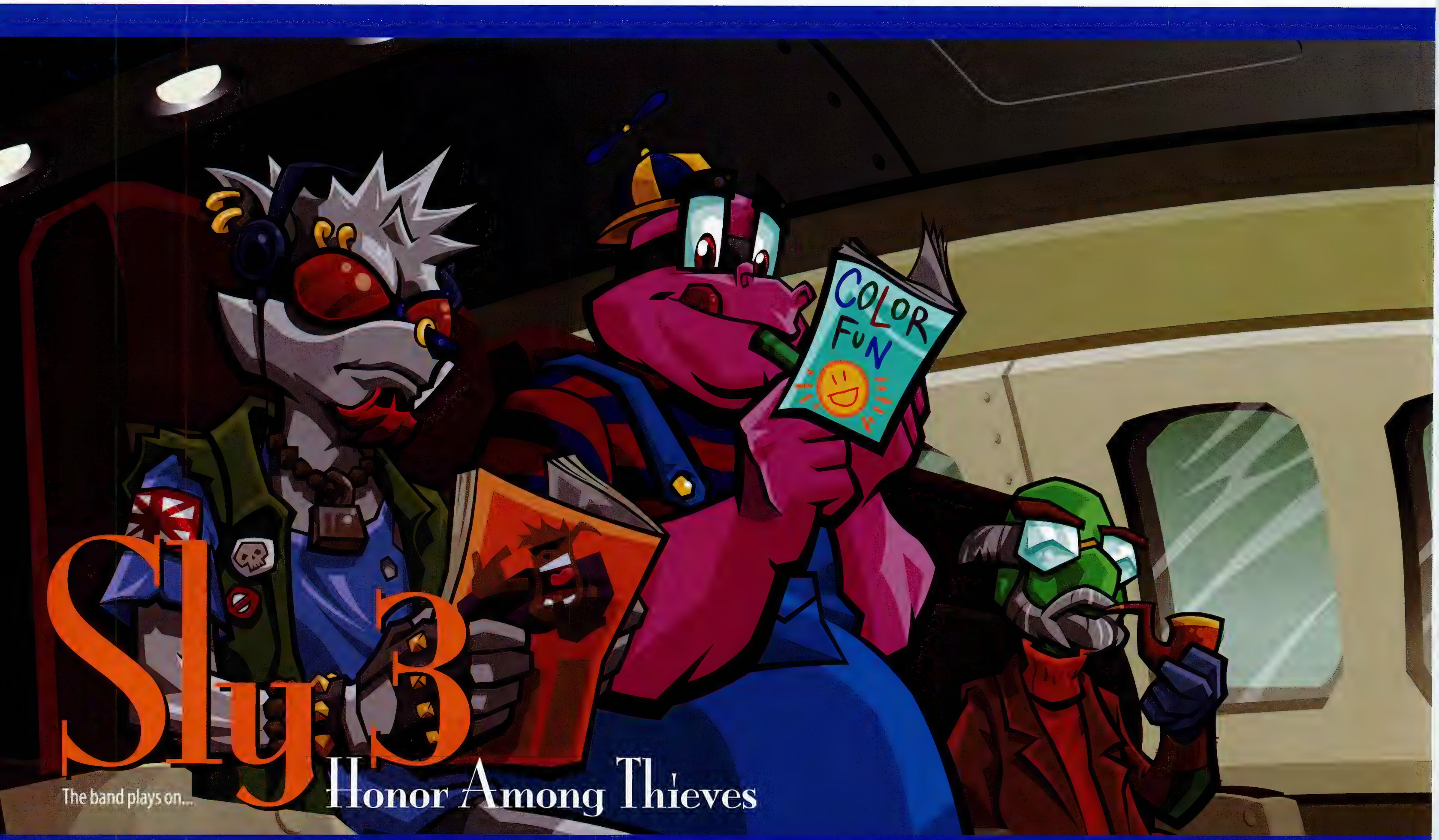
> "We had been inspired by the vehicle gameplay that we had developed over the course of the first three games…"
>
> Evan Wells, co-president, Naughty Dog

The soundtrack is about as good as it gets, if not better. How did you hook up with Billy Howerdel? Also…the intro…bravo: that was killer.
Taylor Kurosaki, our in-house audio/video editor, chose the Queens of the Stone Age music for the intro as we were just beginning production on the game. About that time, we also began to look for our in-game music composer. It was a very important choice for us because we had to make sure that the music was thematically correct for the Jak and Daxter universe and yet had the energy level to keep up with the gameplay. Taylor found a few tracks from A Perfect Circle that seemed to be the perfect fit, so we contacted Billy to see if he was interested. Fortunately for us, he was, and the results have been amazing.

Did you have to tweak your engine much to make this happen?
The Naughty Dog game engine was specifically geared towards making action-adventure games. It's taken an enormous amount of effort to reengineer all of the systems to support the requirements of a racing/vehicle game. Many of the core systems had to be overhauled in order to allow our split-screen mode, our six players online and our extensive vehicle customization.



What would you say is more key in seeing Jak X all the way through: racing skills or weapons deployment skills? Can you get by with either or is it imperative contestants master both?
Since the name of the game is Jak X: Combat Racing, you will definitely have to master both aspects of the game: combat and racing. The various events will definitely challenge you to improve your skills as you learn what it takes to climb through the ranks. However, we've been careful to add multiple modes to the multiplayer that will allow you to compete with those who ordinarily might be out of your league. We have Rookie, Pro and Unlimited modes that restrict the level of customization of your vehicle, so if you just bought the game, you don't have to go up against somebody's fully maxed-out car. And the beautiful part about Jak X is layers of strategy that exist. Weapons and techniques that might seem to dominate on the surface will be replaced by others as you learn more about the game. **play**



Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves

The band plays on...

There was a time when platforming franchises spawned a game a year that stood as the backbone of the industry. With the advent of 3D, however, came two-year and longer development times, bigger budgets, the death of the pack-in and, with it, the death of the mascot. Now, only Sony, who ironically ushered in their demise, remains as the sole publisher providing a steady stream of serialized triple-A platformers: titles that, to a degree, remain the backbone of the industry—at least the part of it that I care about. Of the remaining titles, however, two seem to be moving on, leaving Sly and company as the industry's highest-profile platforming franchise. I know you're thinking: hey, what about Sonic? But great Sonic games have been few and far between (although he's definitely coming back big) and Mario seems to be content starring in the odd handheld game. Nope, it's Sly, at least on the console side, and rightfully so. Few games in the category can hold a candle to this latest installment. Everything great about Sly 2 is improved, everything not is gone, and everything we hoped for has been added, including (trumpets sound) special 3D-glasses stages that will make you happy to be alive and holding a PS2 controller at the same time.

Dave Halverson

Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves

PlayStation 2

Preview

Point of Interest

One sequence in Sly 3 features a drinking game! Of course, the beverage of choice is lemonade...

Dev: Sucker Punch **Pub:** Sony Computer Entertainment America **Online:** None **Available:** September

Interview

Brian Fleming co-founder of Sucker Punch and producer on **Sly 3**

play: The new game seems to combine elements of the first and second, kind of like a more comprehensive version of Sly 2… Is that what you're aiming for—that open-world feel only somewhat streamlined and with more diversity?

Brian Fleming: While we're bringing some of the most core elements of Sly 1 and Sly 2 forward, our challenge is always to create new and exciting challenges for players. So it's not enough to just make more levels in the game; we have to introduce lots of new gameplay (multiplayer, playable Carmelita, biplanes, 3D glasses) and continue to reveal more about the Sly Cooper storyline—including some fun relationship twists for the main characters. We absolutely focus on streamlining the game, because with all the things we're adding, the game can get disjointed and confusing for players—so equally important is what you remove or simplify from game to game, always trying for the perfect balance of old and new.

Sly and company are great out in the open (love the recon bits), but they also shine brightly when you go linear. How are you balancing between the two?

The balance is driven more by how it feels emotionally, but what I can say for sure is that the more linear "platforming" sequences are more prevalent in Sly 3 than they were in Sly 2.

Speaking of the open spaces, the shadows, detail, effects and different hues are all kicked up a notch, and you're still tossing it all around without so much as a hiccup. How much better percentage-wise would you say these graphics are compared to Sly 2?

Well, there definitely are advantages to working on your third title in a series—each time we get the opportunity to rework the technical side of the project, and for each memory and performance optimization the engine team can create, the artists will always reward us with fantastic improvements in the game. It requires work from the entire team, but the results are certainly worth it.

Sly 3 has to make you the undisputed king of play mechanics. Aside from all of the playable characters having their own unique control and abilities, you cover the gamut in terms of devices. How tough a challenge is it tuning all of these different

Sucker Punch has upped the graphics ante yet again.

styles within set environments?
It can be tough, but it's also one of the most enjoyable and rewarding parts of the process, I think. One of our designers has a rule that it won't be right until you've thrown four versions away—and more often than not he's right. We'll typically have a programmer and a designer experiment for a bit, then immediately do dry runs of the new mechanic with our internal staff. We might be three days into developing a new mechanic and already have had two rounds of feedback and improvements. It's the only way we've found to create play modes that are enjoyable and understandable. I mentioned one rule above; another which seems to be true for us: you have no idea if something is going to be fun until it's up and running on the PS2.

I love the buddy sections too. (Working with Bentley is too cool.) Is there a lot of teamwork going on throughout the game? (Cameos are great too; you're getting everyone into the act!)
In Sly 2, typically we did the "buddy" work during the final heists of each episode. This is something we wanted to expand upon for Sly 3, so you'll see lots and lots more teamwork in Honor Among Thieves. We really want to give you a sense that the band of thieves and a few recruits are working together, using teamwork, to pull off these elaborate sequences.

Sly 3 has a very cinematic feel since a lot of the story unfolds within sections of the real-time world. Does this carry through the entire adventure? It's quite a lot of voice too. ADR must have been extensive.
In addition to the intro and "outro" movies for each episode, which have been a trademark of the Sly series, we have always had in-game cinematics to move the game forward, which we've now expanded on. While we always strive for brevity in cutscenes to keep the pacing up, we have improved the cinematic quality of the in-game sequences for Sly 3. We've spent more energy on the animation, camera work and the supporting toolset as well—all of which make the experience better! ADR-wise, it's the biggest game we've ever built—about a 30 percent increase in recorded dialog for Sly 3 vs. Sly 2. Fortunately for us, we continue to work with the same set of terrific voice actors for our main characters, who bring a lot of spontaneous energy to their performances.

So the closer you get with your ensemble, the better the game and the smoother the development… Still, this is a ton of new content to come up with in a year…
We've been very fortunate to have virtually the entire team in place throughout the franchise. With much of the groundwork laid in the first two games, this game obviously started on much more solid footing. We came into it with general ideas and wish lists from the first two games that we couldn't squeeze in (ie 3D, multiplayer and more playable characters). Our last six years have been what put us in a position to move quickly and still work at a high level of quality.

Seems like there's less prodding (real-time help) in this installment as well... Thank you. Is that by design?
Yes it is! It's a bit of a balancing act for us as always…

> "One of our designers has a rule that it won't be right until you've thrown four versions away..."
>
> **Brian Fleming** co-founder of Sucker Punch and producer on **Sly 3**

Did you break Bentley on purpose to put him in the wheelchair or come up with that bit of fun after the fact? He's such a great character. Does the chair evolve in any way?
We love Bentley too. We knew we were going to do the paralysis and wheelchair bit early in the development of Sly 2, and that storyline is delivered in pieces over the course of Sly 2, the comic book that's coming this fall (surprise!) and finally realized in Sly 3. The chair has been "Bentlified" with enough gadgets to make him even a more interesting and enjoyable character to play… And seriously, what fun would it be if he didn't get to upgrade his wheelchair a bit?

Beyond the amazing effect, the 3D glasses actually help distinguish 3D obstacles, on top of making them look simply astounding. How many glasses levels are there, and how difficult is this to implement as well as you have using simple red/blue glasses?
It'll be featured in one job per episode, and be unlockable in many other places…
We had early versions of this working about two years ago. The funny thing is we were really worried that when the movie *Spy Kids 3D* came out, someone else would do the feature and steal our news. We knew about lots of games long ago that had tried red/blue 3D (Rad Racer on the NES for example). Making it work well is really a combination of little details—getting the colors right (a tradeoff, when you consider our main character has a saturated blue shirt on!), getting the eye positions right in subtle ways and even some of the projection matrix math details.

Why do you suppose we haven't seen technology similar to them old Master System 3D Glasses, seeing as how this elevates gameplay substantially?
My suspicion is that it is too cumbersome and tiring to use over the course of extended gameplay. As a result, our approach was to give it to the player in smaller doses—using it only where it's exciting and most visually powerful.

Did you segue immediately into Sly 3? Have you been working on a seamless schedule from the get-go or do you actually have to stop and assess each game's performance before planning the next?
We began work on Sly 3 immediately upon (even a tiny bit before) Sly 2's completion. But at the same time, it's not at all like we had a completed game design document ready to go September 1st and began production. We tend to build games over time, and some of that time was spent listening to what our fans had to say. As a result, Sly 3 reflects a tremendous amount of feedback from our fans. In fact, playable Carmelita and multiplayer mode were the top two "wish list" features fans requested.

I know I've asked this before, but here I go again… Action figures and a cartoon seem mandatory. I mean, how can you not? It's a big, rich critter stew so perfect for big-brandom it's not even funny… Any news to report?
We're excited about all the marketing-related activities surrounding the development of Sly 3. There are definitely some goodies on the way… Stay tuned for an official announcement.

Yada-yada-yada… This is like the old days, only faster. It's so great to have a franchise like Sly that keeps evolving and giving fans more of what they want, along with amazing additions and refinements. Will you continue this onto PS3? We certainly hope so…look at Sonic, Castlevania, Metroid, Metal Gear… The best series never end!
At the moment, our full concentration is on making Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves a fun game that everyone will want to play. After completing the North American version, we will begin localization (14 languages!) for all the international territories. It's simply hilarious to hear Sly and the gang talk in French, German, Korean, Japanese, etc. We are starting to think about next-gen, but it's still a ways off for now.

Just don't do a kart racer. If anything, Sprocket 2 beckons!
No comment… **play**

Reviews

September 2005

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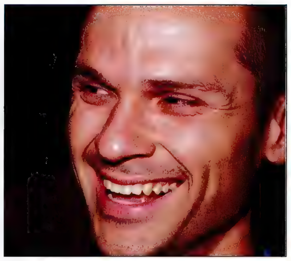
Dave Halverson

Editor in Chief

Dave critiques every game based on how well it hits its target audience, and has been practicing what he preaches in print for 13 years. He truly lives for his games. Within everything Dave writes, you will also find a little bit of his personal love of the art of gaming and game creation, the driving force in his life outside of music and actual human interaction.

Favorite genres: Platformers, adventure, motocross, action-RPGs, 2D
Now playing: Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes
Favorite Character: Tie: Vanessa Z. Schneider and Kelly O'Lemney



Brady Fiechter

Executive Editor

Brady feels that when you've been playing video games since video games were invented, you tend to start to look past the unnecessary need to boil a game down to its mechanical parts and start to see the artistry and spirit of imagination that goes into its creation. It's never as simple as polygons and cool explosions.

Favorite genres: Adventure, first-person shooters, action, RPGs
Now playing: Suffering: Ties That Bind
Favorite Character: Alucard (Castlevania: Symphony of the Night)

Chris Hoffman

Senior Editor

Chris is extremely loyal to his gaming roots, and doesn't believe that just because a game (or concept) is old it isn't any good. On the contrary, Chris thinks that more of the same only better is definitely a good thing, although he's always looking for new experiences to take gaming to new heights. Squirrel army status: deep into basic training.

Favorite genres: RPGs, action, adventure, fighting, wrestling
Now playing: Trace Memory
Favorite Character: Tie: Mike Haggar (Final Fight), Gillian Seed (Snatcher)

Mike Griffin

PC Editor

Even as a wee lad playing Zaxxon on Coleco, the technology and artistry of game design has always fascinated Mike. He thinks some games are timeless in that respect, whether 2D, 3D, flat-shaded or bump mapped. Mike's goal is to equip the readers with accurate information, so that limited funds and time can be put to good use.

Favorite genres: MMORPGs, first-person shooters, action-adventure
Now playing: Auto Assault
Favorite Character: Nights (NiGHTS)

Ashley "Veela" Esqueda

Associate Editor

To Ashley, video games are like magnificent pieces of art: you don't break down the piece as a whole to comment on the brush stroke method or colors used. She thanks her mother for playing Castlevania II after school, and everyone in elementary school for shunning her, because without them, her obsession with gaming would not have been possible.

Favorite genres: Action, RPG, adventure
Now playing: Simon's Quest: Castlevania II
Favorite Character: Gregg, the Grim Reaper (Conker: Live & Reloaded)

Michael Hobbs

Art Director

A gamer since Space Invaders, Michael has a soft spot for 2D shooters and other games that directly engage the player. Nintendo certainly ranks high on his list of favorite developers, and though recent forays into the world of MMORPGs have rather consumed him, he'll always have time for a game of Bangaio.

Favorite genres: Action, racing, adventure, alternative, shooters
Now playing: Killer 7
Favorite Character: Mario

play magazine
GAME of the MONTH

Legend of Kay 053

Capcom wisely snapped up Neon Studios' incredible new platformer and, in doing so, filled the void where the third Maximo should be... Truly a great game in every way.

Rating System

Our scores represent both a game's technical merits and our personal opinions based on our expertise within each genre, of which the numbers alone do not necessarily tell the whole story. A perfect 10 represents a game that is flawless in the reviewer's opinion. Such a high standard means that 10s will be incredibly rare, but when it happens, it symbolizes that this game isn't just the very best—it's the best of the best.

10	**Perfect**
9	**Extraordinary**
8	**Great**
7	**Good**
6	**Decent**
5	**Average**
4	**Below average**
3	**Poor**
2	**Bad**
1	**Terrible**

Legend of Kay

Capcom strikes feline gold

I love everything about Legend of Kay, right up until the animals start to yap. Talking animals are one thing, but I draw the line at Rastafarian frogs and writing so hokey it makes me wince. Thankfully, however, you can crank the voice all the way down in Legend of Kay, leaving nothing but praise for this unexpected, remarkable, action-platforming epic. Thank you, Capcom… Now go liberate Asterix & Obelix XXL 2 and I'll mow your lawn…or at least hire someone to.

Taking up the torch for cat, panda, rabbit and frog, and driving back the gorilla, rat, turtle and alligator insurgence, Legend of Kay is an infinitely creative, stupendously realized adventure jam-packed with every last play mechanic in the book, all ultra-refined in an adventure that's graphically on par with first-party Sony, no lie. Walls constructed stone by stone, individual blades of grass, dense foliage, incredible textures and fine detail abound. Exploring the depths of the turtle fortress, for instance, among their dimly lit underground stronghold, you'll find tiny fabricated workout benches and lockers, where they hang their hard shells, with every last furnishing assembled as if real. One of the big three ought to snap up Neon Studios after this.

And on the gameplay scale, every riding, swinging, timing, puzzle, switch-throwing, jumping, dodging and swimming device is in here (and then some), along with an innovative battle and aerial system that uses arrows to connect moves, flinging Kay to and fro in battle at lightning speeds or through the air, chaining together combos between floating bells. Additional battle moves include blocking, flaming air maneuvers and special strikes, and an assortment of potions and agents to cast spells, heal and so on, all available at stands throughout the game. And get this: no menu at save points. Merely standing in front of them saves the game. Nothing—not a single dynamic—is missing. Kay's gameplay is everything Zelda's is, only jumping is a key skill, rather than set on auto. It truly is all that.

Things aren't as fruity as they might seem either; a cute and bubbly kiddy game this definitely is not. While it's certainly kid-friendly (all the best games are), the characters may be fur-bearin', but there's nothing adorable about them. The odd pet-shop critter may weigh in on the fruity side, but overall, the rats, alligators and apes are suitably nasty. I'm sure they'd throw their poop if they had any. Rather, the entire game is bathed in an ancient Chinese mystique, from its look to its captivating neo-Asian soundtrack—one of the best for a platformer I've come across. Unless you're allergic to polygonal cats, definitely have a go at Legend of Kay. Turns out polygonal cats shed only joy.

Dave Halverson

> *"…every riding, swinging, timing, puzzle, switch-throwing, jumping, dodging and swimming device is in here (and then some)…"*

Legend of Kay 9.0

PlayStation 2 Score

A vast platforming epic packed with every play mechanic in the book, amazing control and animation, and first-party-quality visuals

☒ Turn down the voice…it's bad. Rastafarian frog bad.

Developer: Neon Studios **Publisher:** Capcom
Online: None **Available:** October

Below: An example of Kay's formidable battle system in action.

2198/2209
71

Radiata Stories

Unlikely hero for an unstable world

I don't think I've ever played an action-RPG that's as slow to get going as Radiata Stories. The setting is fairly generic fantasy, the story initially of the "I wanna be a hero" type, and protagonist Jack Russell is an absolute imbecile. Not only is he the most immature 16-year-old ever (he acts like he's in second grade), but he has the fruitiest hurried walk animation I've ever seen. The supporting characters aren't much better, and the humor often falls flat. As you take Jack from wannabe knight to Warriors' Guild flunky to a sergeant in charge of his own brigade, you'll wonder if there's a point to any of this.

About 16 hours later you'll learn the answer (give or take—there's lots of optional quests and it's sometimes easy to get lost concerning where to go next). The innocent and cheeky story becomes a bit more mature—even poignant at times, considering the political climate of the world today—as does Jack (a teeny, tiny bit, and even then it seems kinda forced), and other characters reveal that there's more to them than the caricatures initially portrayed. The game finally starts to reveal its scope, and players are even presented with two distinctly different paths to take, leading to an exciting, intriguing latter half of the tale.

> "The game finally starts to reveal its scope, and players are even presented with two distinctly different paths to take…"

Along the way, you'll be treated to good voice acting, some very nice storybook-style graphics—reminiscent of some of Square's best 2D work on PS1, only in full 3D—and a fun real-time battle system. The 3/4-view combat is almost purely reflex-based, not unlike tri-Ace's Star Ocean series, and there are plenty of skills and formations to aid you in battle. While your three allies are CPU-controlled, they actually have decent AI, usually the Achilles' heel of such fighting systems. You'll also be able to interact with more than 170 characters, each with daily routines that adhere to the game's day-night cycle. Make friends with them by accomplishing a subquest or other event, and you'll get them to join your cause as allies (although not all of them will join in a single play-through); Suikoden fans may want to take note. On the downside, most of the adventuring takes place on linear pathways, so exploration is pretty minimal, and there's a distinct lack of save points during missions.

If you manage to stay the course and get past Radiata Stories' early rough spots, you'll find an engaging adventure beneath the goofy exterior. It's not Square Enix's best, but an enjoyable effort nonetheless. Chris Hoffman

2209/2209
MAX
67
12
12

Radiata Stories 7.0 Score

PlayStation 2

○ Fun battle system, two distinct story branches, lots of characters to acquire.

☒ Story takes a long time to get going, and you'll want to strangle main character Jack.

Developer: tri-Ace **Publisher:** Square Enix
Online: None **Available:** September

His name is Jack.
As in "jackass."

Genji

Dawn of the Samurai

A first-rate samurai action game with a gorgeous look

As the first game out of ex-Capcom producer Okamoto Yoshiki's new studio, Game Republic, the visually arresting Genji: Dawn of the Samurai takes place in ancient Japan, where warring factions, demons and sorcery coexist amongst the serenity of a most beautiful and peaceful land. We've explored such a familiar space before—the mountain passes, the snow-covered gardens, the dungeon tombs, the neighboring towns filled with the occasional shop, conversation and palace opening that turns into a world unto itself—yet has it all ever been represented with such delicate allure?

It's too bad the game ends so quickly, without a completely realized conclusion to the build-up of role-playing experience and story. Just when you expect the game to fully bloom, it leaves you yearning for a more complex middle act.

But how absorbing Genji can be when it's at its best! Instantly, the close-quarters combat feels exactly as you'd hope for in a high-quality samurai action game, with every swing of the club and slice of the blade fluidly empowering you. There are plenty of potions and amulets to feed your attributes and powers, but magic and projectile attacks are nonexistent, leaving the combat to straight-ahead bashing. Whether assuming the role of the nimble, more appealing Yoshitsune, or the brutally strong yet slow-to-the-swing Benkei, the goal is the same: take out as many enemies as you can without receiving a blow to interrupt your combo, and you'll be rewarded according to your skills. By collecting magical shards that are dropped by enemies and invisibly scattered throughout the land, your characters can level up health, defense and strength—a minor but fun touch. The move set is kept pretty simple, augmented by the effective hook of giving you the ability to momentarily slow down time; when implemented at just the right moment, a converging group of foes or pesky boss onslaught can be eliminated in one powerful strike. Miss the timing, and you're open to more damage.

The game relies heavily on telling a story, with many nice cutscenes and reams of Japanese dialogue—it's all been subtitled—detailing the very simple tale of vengeance and search for peace. At the center of the conflict is a quest for Amahagane, powerful stones that grant their user omnipotence. The constant empty boss banter and silly banalities began to weigh by the end, but that tends to be no big surprise from a game like this, and Genji: Dawn of the Samurai survives its stumbles as a strong success.

Brady Fiechter

Genji: Dawn of the Samurai **8.5** Score

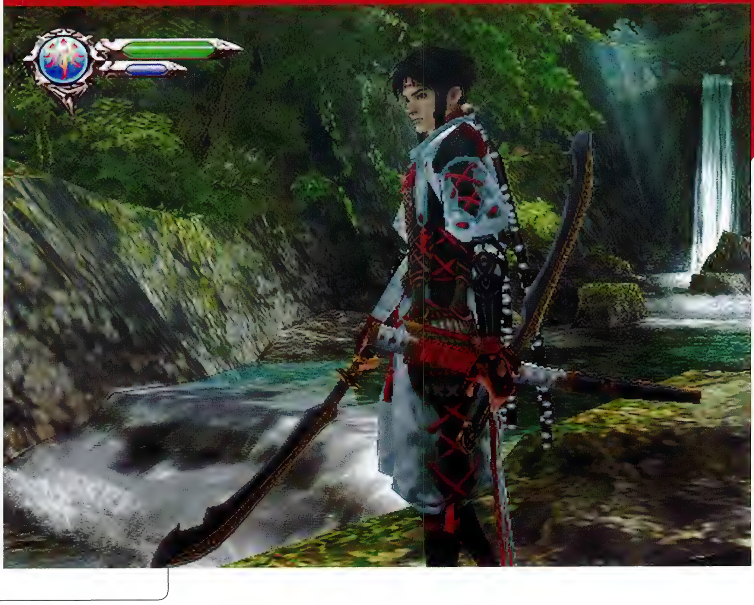
PlayStation 2

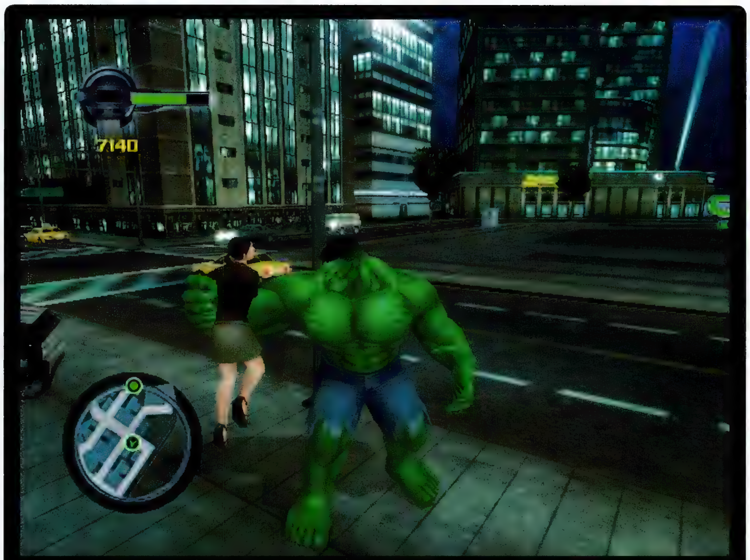
✓ Superb action, gorgeous settings, some nice touches that make it more than a straight action game.

✗ That story needs some work; game needs more density to justify length.

Dev: Game Republic **Pub:** Sony Computer Entertainment America **Online:** None **Available:** September

"...the close-quarters combat feels exactly as you'd hope for in a high-quality samurai action game..."





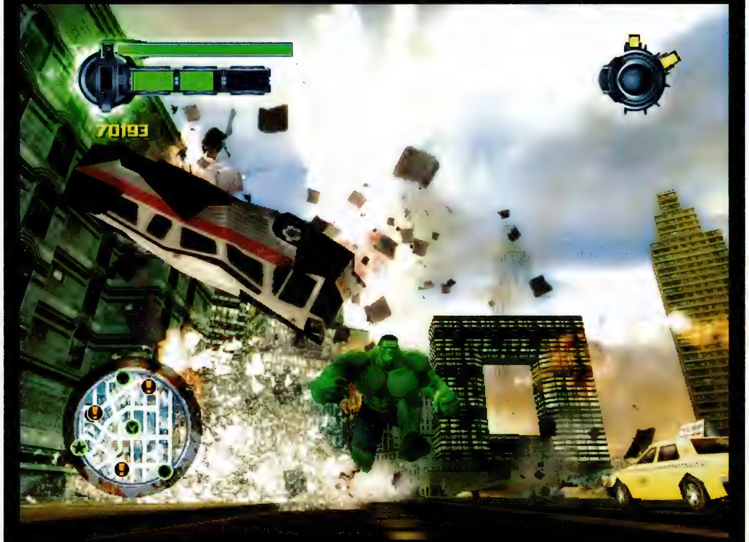
The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube

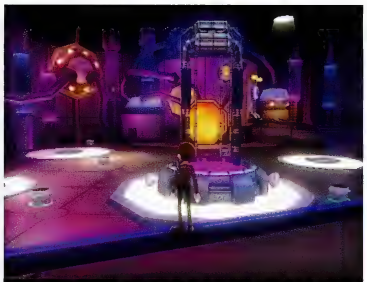
Dev: Radical Entertainment **Pub:** VU Games **Online:** None **Available:** August

8.0
Score

Spider-Man 2, Batman Begins, Constantine, The Punisher…and now The Hulk…all quality comic book games; go figure. Radical has wisely left Banner behind this time out and opted for a Spidey/GTA-type free-roamer—Hulk-style—and is it ever a thumping good time. Following a sequence of missions (and side quests if you so desire) through nicely varied chapters, the emphasis here is on heavy-duty guilty pleasure carnage deluxe, via purchasing more and more Hulk-a-riffic moves as you take on mission upon mission, dodging the NSA (and the crazed gamma freak of the week, Emil Blonsky) and laying the smack down on anything in your path, trying to find a cure that, as far as I'm concerned, can stay hidden as long as they produce games this cool. Dave Halverson



"…the emphasis here is on heavy-duty guilty pleasure carnage deluxe…"



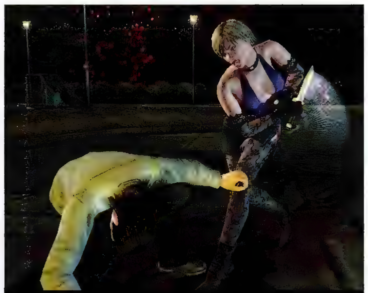
Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube

Developer: High Voltage
Publisher: Global Star Software
Online: None
Available: July

4.5
Score

I haven't seen the film, but the game's completely creeped me out. Willy Wonka sounds like Michael Jackson with a helium hose up his butt and the Oompa-Loompas are just plain scary. It's a shame High Voltage couldn't manage to create a game as clever as their ingenious 2D story diorama bits, opting instead for a bare-bones run-of-the-mill 3D puzzle-actioner saturated with eye-bleeding color and overflowing with tired devices and clunky gameplay, as Charlie roams about the factory employing Oompa-Loompas to carry out tasks to open his way. In their defense, by the looks of it, they had strict guidelines and limited resources and time to boot. Take a pass. Dave Halverson



Beatdown: Fists of Vengeance

PlayStation 2, Xbox

Developer: cavia
Publisher: Capcom
Online: None
Available: August

4.5
Score

I didn't expect this one from Capcom, so pardon me if I sound…surprised at the outcome. A fighting/GTA/RPG hybrid, Beatdown is an attempt to bring us something different and unique, but unfortunately, just doesn't gel, with misshapen models, repetitive, bland music and a watered-down story that struggles to maintain a "thug-like" quality through forced profanity. I can say that I've never played anything quite like it before…but that's not necessarily a good thing. Building up influence on the streets of Las Sombras wasn't supposed to be this way. This is definitely not the Capcom magic I know and love. Ashley Esqueda

Sonic Gems Collection

GameCube

Dev: Sega/Sonic Team/Traveller's Tales **Pub:** Sega **Online:** None **Available:** August

8.5

Score

I could go on about how Sega decided to only give us the American Sonic CD soundtrack and how they included the Vectorman games instead of Streets of Rage as bonuses (as opposed to the Japanese version), but let's face it: this is still an excellent classics compilation, due mostly to Sonic CD, finally revived after so much begging. It still holds up as Sonic's best; the time-traveling mixed with Sonic's speed is genius. Getting a home version of Sonic the Fighters is great too, and the Game Gear games are nice for completists. I personally love Sonic R; the framerate and visuals are even enhanced (probably because it's a port of the PC version). Everyone should play these games. Chris Hoffman

"It still holds up as Sonic's best; the time-traveling mixed with Sonic's speed is genius."

Geist

GameCube

Developer: N-Space **Publisher:** Nintendo **Online:** None **Available:** August

5.5

Score

You can see some of the cool ideas the developers were going for in Geist, but those good intentions mean little when so many things are going wrong around every turn. The game can be a murky, sloppy mess, and even when it's trying something interesting, comes off incomplete and badly implemented. As a disembodied spirit looking for its vessel, your character floats through the game possessing inanimate objects to scare people enough that they're open for the jacking, mostly in an attempt to use their visage to find clearance to a new area. Enemies in the game act like they're already dead, the boss battles are inelegant and repetitive, and the incoherent story that started out sort of interesting deflates to a meaningless finale of ponderous shootouts. Brady Fiechter

Heroes of the Pacific

PlayStation 2, Xbox, PC

Dev: IR Gurus Int. **Pub:** Red Mile Ent./Encore **Online:** 8p vs., team **Available:** September

8.5

Score

I'm not one for flight sims, but Heroes of the Pacific has given me a reason to enjoy the genre. For those of you that can't stand complex flight sim controls, there's arcade controls, which won't allow you to perform barrel rolls, but the computer keeps your orientation in check and completing objectives is easier. The professional controls offer tougher challenges; if you lose your orientation, you're on your own, and it's tough to get those enemy fighters in your sights. During a level you'll be updated with different missions (escorts, protection, bombing runs and more), making each level fast-paced and diverse. Casual and hardcore gamers alike will enjoy this WWII flight sim…definitely one worth checking out. Ashley Esquesda

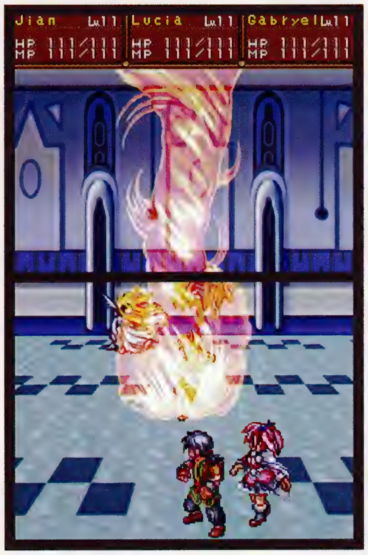
"…Heroes of the Pacific has given me a reason to enjoy the genre."

LUNAR
Dragon Song

The Blue Star beckons again...

Role-playing aficionados have waited nearly 10 years for an original game in the renowned Lunar series to grace North American shores, and now, with the imminent release of Lunar: Dragon Song for the Nintendo DS, a decade of wishes is about to come true. Reaching back 1000 years before the events in the first Lunar game, Dragon Song takes place at a time when Beastmen were Lunar's dominant race, the magical city of Vane was but an inkling, and the Vile Tribe, led by a being called Ignatius, was threatening to throw the world into chaos. It's under these circumstances where we meet our youthful heroes: Jian, an acrobatic courier who's determined to prove the value of humans, and Lucia, Jian's female companion and business partner, among others. Aside from the new timeframe and characters, Dragon Song also has several new features to set it apart from its predecessors, including a new isometric perspective, a three-member-party battle system, Battle Cards that grant characters new powers, even the ability to flee battles by yelling into the DS' microphone. Lunar: Dragon Song is shaping up to be very promising indeed, but don't just take our word for it; we checked in with the presidents of JAM and Game Arts to find out just what's going to make this game live up to fans' lofty expectations.

Chris Hoffman


Jian Lv11 HP 111/111 MP 111/111
Lucia Lv11 HP 111/111 MP 111/111
Gabryel Lv11 HP 111/111 MP 111/111

Lunar: Dragon Song

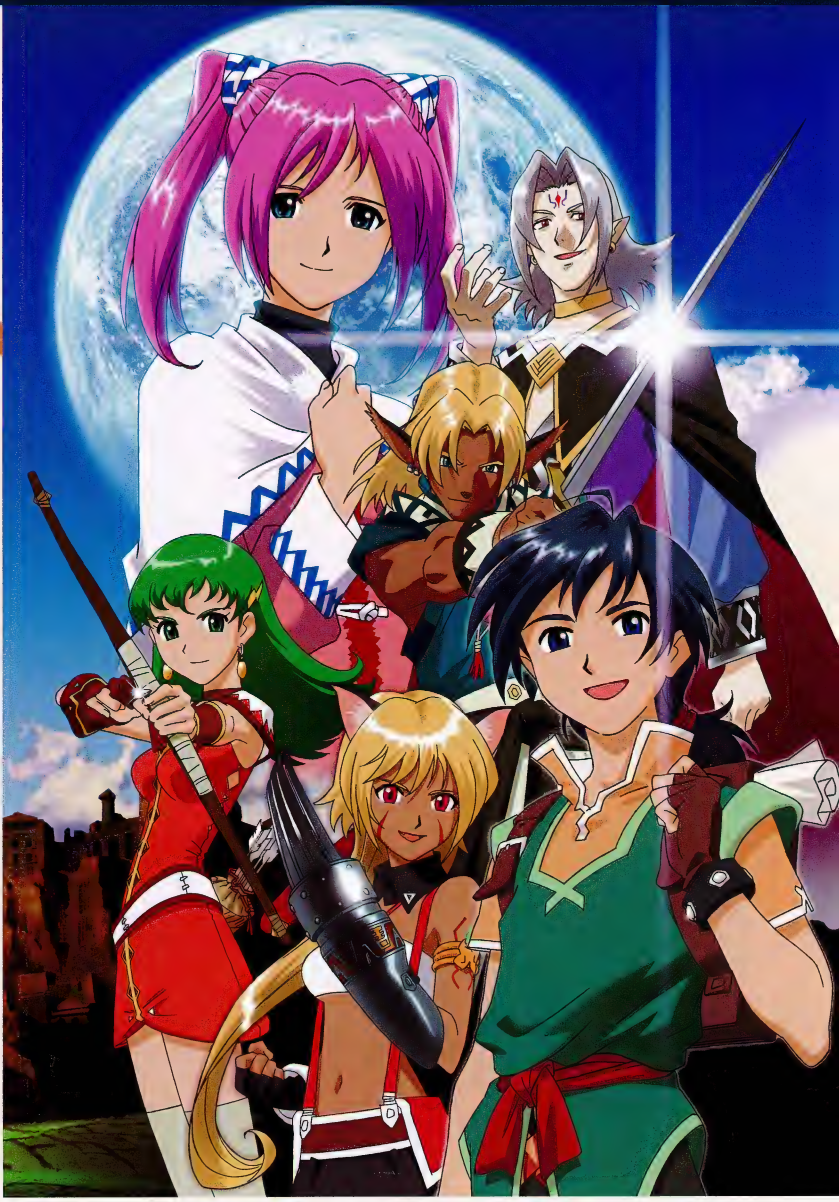
Preview

Nintendo DS

Point of Interest

There actually was a Lunar game released following Lunar: Eternal Blue—Lunar: Magic School—but it didn't come to the U.S.

Developer: JAM(Japan Arts Media)/Game Arts **Publisher:** Ubisoft **Multiplayer:** Item trading **Available:** September



Interview

Youichi Miyaji president **Game Arts** and **Mitsuru Takahashi** president **JAM (Japan Arts Media)**

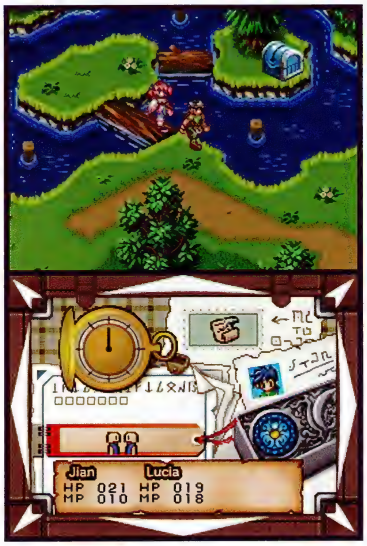
play: Thanks for bringing us back to the world of Lunar with a brand-new game. Why has it taken so long for a new installment, and why is it happening now?
Youichi Miyaji: It requires a lot of courage to create a new game, so we needed to be ready to embark on a new journey, so that's why it took a while for the new Lunar.

What made you decide to bring Lunar: Dragon Song out on DS instead of other systems?
Miyaji: The next-generation consoles seem to be all about graphics, and while we have created fantastic graphics in the game, I really wanted to create a "Lunar." So, I chose Nintendo DS because the DS is a great machine with pioneer features such as its interface.

How would you describe Game Arts' role on the project? Why are you not directly developing the game yourselves?
Miyaji: Though we are not directly developing Lunar: Dragon Song, as we have also been working on Grandia 3, we have a supervisory role in the game's development.

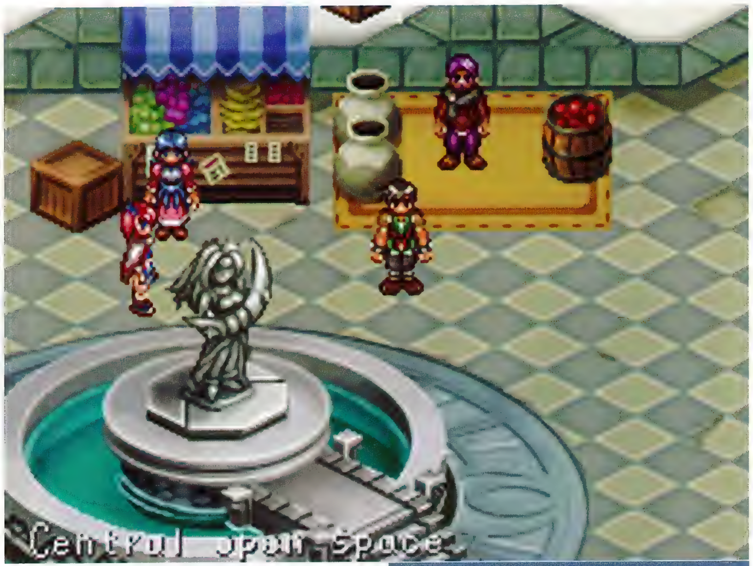
What makes the story of Dragon Song an important part of Lunar's history?
Mitsuru Takahashi: Lunar: Dragon Song is like the genesis of the Lunar history. But you must remember, such an episode of a hero, such as Jian's story or Alex's story, is maybe only one page of Lunar's long history.

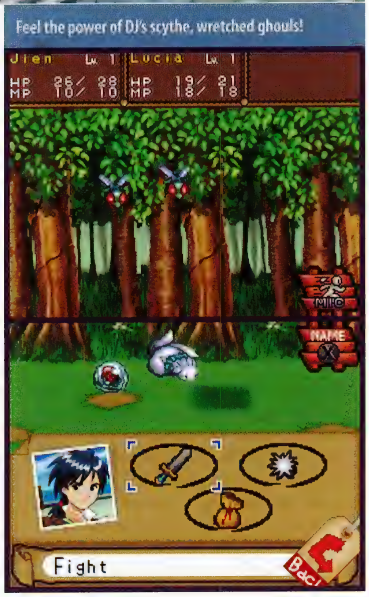
From what I have heard so far, some of the story elements seem to parallel Lunar: Silver Star Story. Is this your intent or did it just come out naturally this way?
Takahashi: We did it unintentionally somehow. For many titles, the original world outlooks are destroyed in their sequels. However, I strongly wanted to avoid that and keep the original Lunar world. By respecting the original, we can continue to keep a feeling of the Lunar world.



I was curious as to why the character is named Lucia, since that was a character in Eternal Blue. What's the reason for her name?
Takahashi: In the Japanese version, it was actually "Lueshia" in Eternal Blue and it is "Lucia" in Dragon Song. They are close, but actually different. Luna, Loona, Naru [in English: Lunar, Luna, Nall] and such... I didn't make a conscious effort to use names similar to the names in the original Lunar to keep the Lunar world. (Honestly, I didn't notice it until you pointed it out.)

Also, is there a reason that Lucia has




Feel the power of DJ's scythe, wretched ghouls!

pink hair instead of blue hair like other Lunar heroines?
Takahashi: We wanted to distinguish between heroines. Also, we wanted this Lucia to be more youthful.

What can you tell me about the new villain, Ignatius, and how would you compare him to Ghaleon?
Takahashi: Personally I like him, so much that we may not want to finish with him in this Lunar: Dragon Song story. Circumstances and ideology wise, Ghaleon and Ignatius have so much in common. However, I think Ignatius is crueler than Ghaleon.

How important is the relationship between humans and Beastmen to the story?
Takahashi: It's like a spice to the Lunar: Dragon Song world. Since main characters don't discriminate against the other races, maybe you don't really find their relationships to be a crucial part of the story. However, for citizens of the Lunar world, it is very hard for humans, who they perceive to be weak, to be accepted and respected by the Beastmen. Jian and his friends have a hard time.

Is there an underlying theme you want to convey through the relationship between these races?
Takahashi: Respect fundamental human rights. All the characters in the Lunar world are equal beyond the races. I think that's the theme here.

What kinds of recognizable landmarks will the game contain that will be familiar to long-time Lunar fans?
Takahashi: Caldor Isles appears as Continent of Caldor, and the Frontier appears as it is in Lunar: Dragon Song. Since the eras are different, it's impossible to have the same characters from the previous series appear in Lunar: Dragon Song.

What made you decide to go with an isometric perspective instead of the traditional overhead view?
Takahashi: We wanted to make the best use of the two screens. Because of that, we succeeded to achieve the spatial movements.

Who will be handling the music for the game? Is there a reason series composer Noriyuki Iwadare isn't involved?
Takahashi: Lunar will continue to evolve with various talented creators specialized in certain areas. The important thing is to respect and surpass the previous series. It can be achieved by someone different from the one who worked on the area for previous series.

Will Lunar: Dragon Song have fully animated cutscenes? What about voice acting?
Takahashi: Unfortunately, we couldn't include those due to the Nintendo DS' capabilities. However, in the near future, we'd like to do a project that can have those. Of course, we will need the fans' great support.

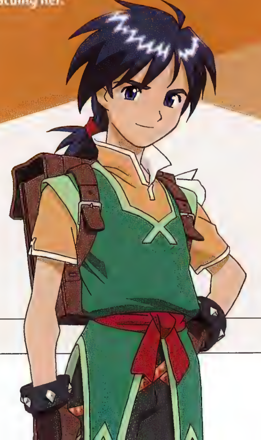
Aside from what we've already talked about, what makes Dragon Song fundamentally different from previous Lunar games?
Takahashi: There is not a fundamental difference between previous Lunar series and Lunar: Dragon Song. Save the entire world or save only the one girl? Alex chose to live for the one girl. Jian teaches us that a person himself is not strong, but someone he wants to protect makes him strong. But Jian seems to be the same type as Alex. The relationship between a man and woman in the Lunar world is very fundamental and universal. I'd like to continue to keep this in the next series. We won't fail your expectations.

Do you see Lunar: Dragon Song as reinvigorating the Lunar franchise? What other ideas do you have for the Lunar world, and do you think we might see a new Lunar on console?
Miyaji: I have plans for new games with the next generation consoles (X360, PS3). However, we would experience a lot of difficulties, including graphics, in creating new-gen games. As a producer, I'd like to create a story for adults. So many different things happen in our lives. What's right and what's wrong? What's real and what's imaginary? I think a deep story can naturally reflect those types of life experiences, and let users interpret the story in various ways with their own understanding and approaches. A new Lunar will be certainly born, and until then, please keep the support coming. **play**

Jian Campbell

Race: Human
Age: 15

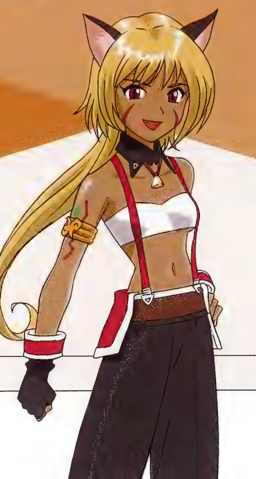
The hero of Dragon Song, Jian is a courier in the town of Port Searis, but when he learns that the Goddess Althena has been kidnappaed, he is determined to prove that humans are just as capable as Beastmen by rescuing her.



Gabryel Ryan

Race: Beastwoman
Age: 15

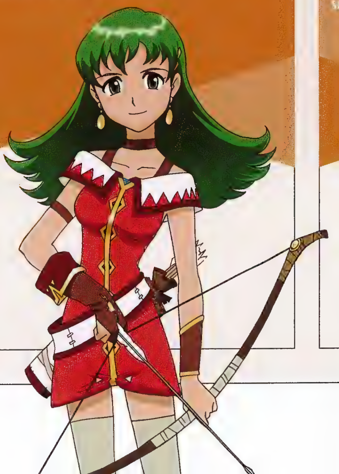
Unlike most Beastmen, Gabryel treats humans as equals. She's a strong fighter who uses a claw as her main weapon.



Flora Banks

Race: Human
Age: 13

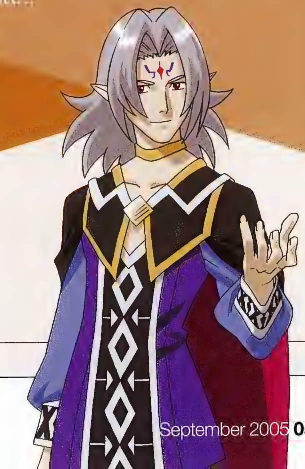
A member of a group of humans that lives within the desolate Frontier region, Flora is a skilled archer with an innocent and cheerful personality.



Ignatius

Race: Vile Tribe
Age: Unknown

Ignatius rules the Vile Tribe with an iron fist and has apparently made a play for power by capturing the Goddess Althena. He also harbors a powerful secret. . .



MediEvil Resurrection

To die for...again

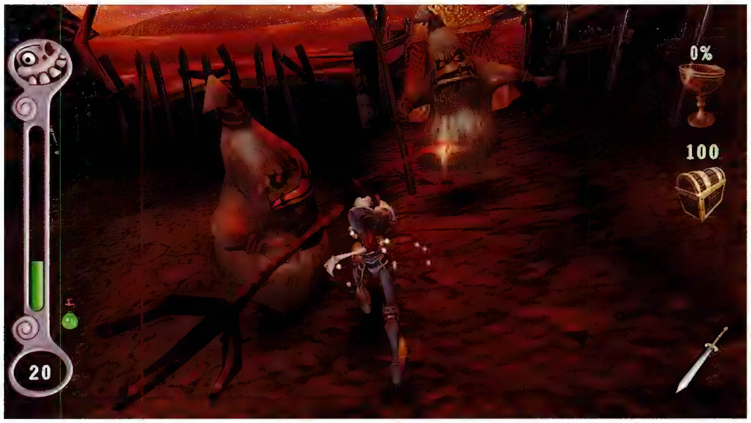
The goofiest bag-o'-bones ever once again delivers the fun.

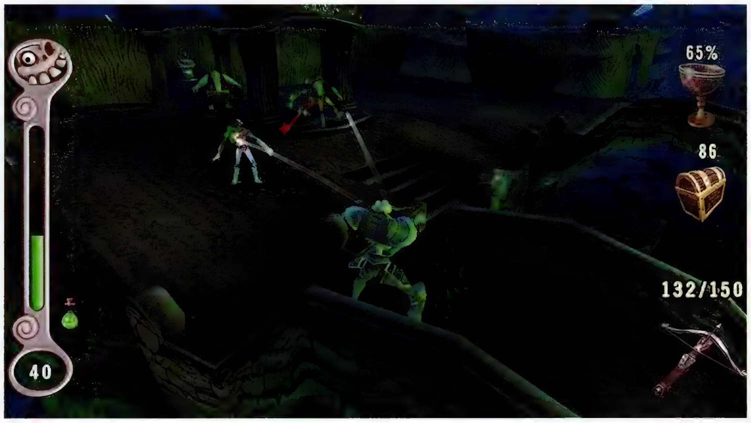
Along with Death, Jr., MediEvil is (or if it's not, it should be) the most anticipated game for PSP. Together, let's hope they last a good long time too, because it's not like there's a string of great action and/or adventure games waiting in the wings. Soon enough the PSP will surely blossom, but in the meantime, thank your lucky stars (as if there was any doubt) that Cambridge Studios' third installment in the MediEvil series is, once again, all that and a bottle of 150-proof embalming fluid. What we sadly never got on PS2 seems better suited for PSP anyway, because, if nothing else, it is by far the best-looking PSP game I have ever seen, and as you may know, I am a connoisseur of such things. But don't you worry your pretty little skulls, the gameplay is good too, with shades of great; but it's mostly just good.

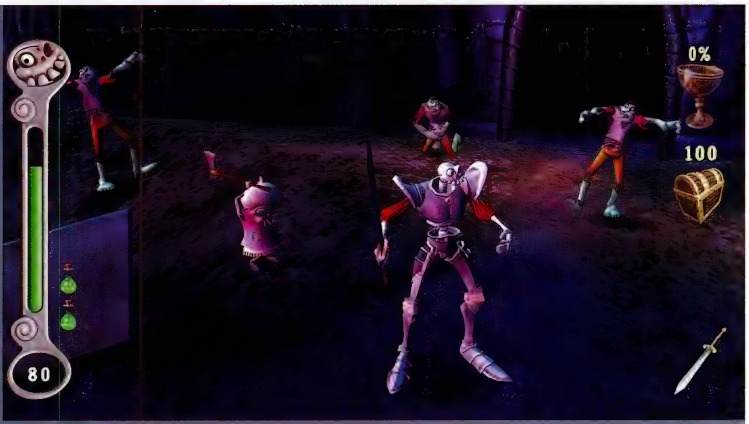
Awakened by a strange voice in his head—because there actually is a little man living in his head, in his empty eye socket to be exact—Sir Dan is called upon once again to vanquish Zarok, although we all know he never really did in the first place; he took the first arrow and died in the dirt, but that is neither here nor there. Dan needs to discover the four pieces of the Anubis Stone, which will enable him to form an all-powerful army and crush the evil sorcerer once and for all, or at least until MediEvil 4 comes out. So to the Necropolis!

The gameplay model here is as you remember, simple bash-and-kill combat using sword, club and hammer within spooky action-puzzle environments, discovering rune stones to open gates by solving action-riddles and interacting with a Monty Python-like gaggle of undead characters. And Cambridge is in true form. The wit is, as you can imagine, far superior to anything America has to offer, and the action, while rudimentary in terms of play mechanics, is incredibly well-devised. What DJ does for action and shooting, MediEvil does for adventure, although there are a few dead flies drowning in the ointment. Via the PSP's flat analog slippy disc, the control is a tad washy, jumping a little hokey, and the camera is positioned in such a way that it's hard to accurately gauge smaller enemies' proximity, making it hard to time swings with larger weapons such as the warhammer. These are minor grievances, however, amidst a game as beautiful and polished as this. Once again exhibiting their prowess as one of the finest developers in the world, MediEvil is ultra-polished, filled with wonder and brilliant level design and set to a soundtrack I'd put up against any console game on the market. This is what every PSP gamer wants. Now may I please have another? **Dave Halverson**

> "The wit is, as you can imagine, far superior to anything America has to offer..."







MediEvil Resurrection **8.5**

PSP Score

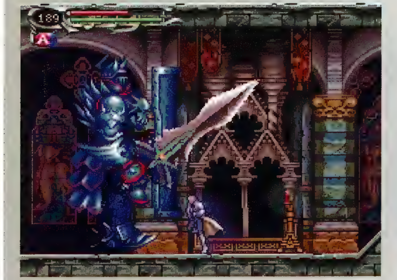
○ Absolutely, without a doubt, the best-looking PSP game to date. Best cinemas, best soundtrack and actual good humor.

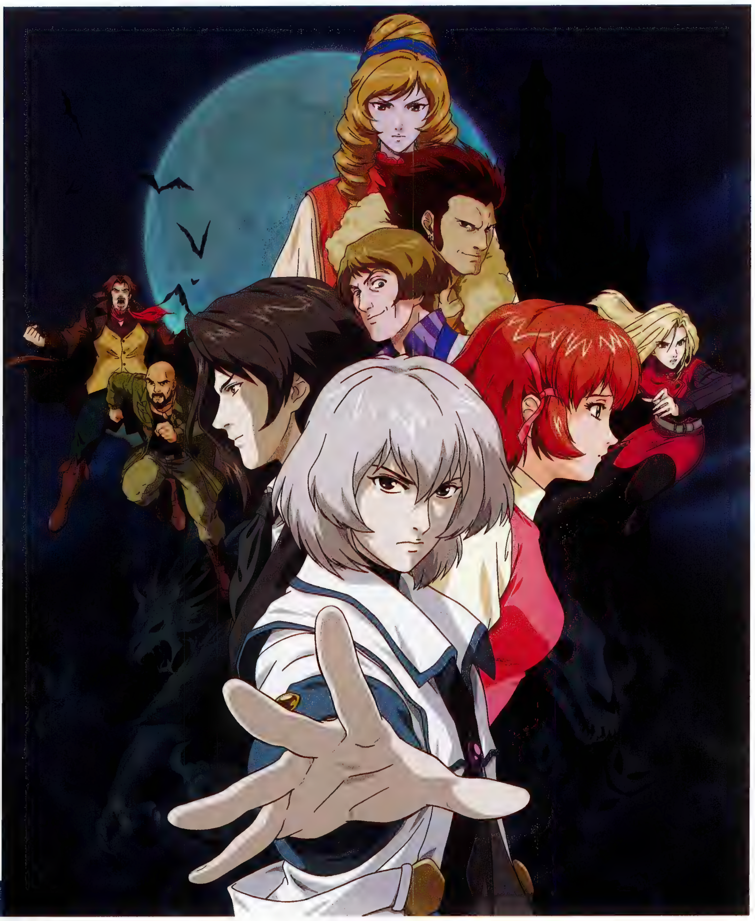
☒ Control is a little dicey, camera a little low.

Developer: SCEE Cambridge Studios **Publisher:** SCEA
Multiplayer: 2p versus minigames **Available:** September

Castlevania
Dawn of Sorrow
It may take your soul

The more we get to play of Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow, the more we can't wait for the final version. As with its GBA predecessor, Aria of Sorrow, and the legendary Symphony of the Night before that, Dawn of Sorrow blends action, adventure, role-playing and horror into what appears to be another 2D masterpiece. Konami continues to taunt us by revealing new areas, new bosses—such as the Puppet Master, who pulls hero Soma Cruz into spiked sarcophagi—and new features, like a fully animated intro and a versus mode where two players race to reach the end of an area and defeat all foes along the way. Another excellent feature is Soma's ability to collect enemy souls, enhanced over its presence in Aria in that Soma can now collect up to nine multiples of the same soul, thus increasing its power and functionality. With the development essentially finished, we decided to have words one more time with renowned series producer Koji Igarashi to let him fill in the blanks about what to expect from his latest creation. **Chris Hoffman**





Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow
Preview
Nintendo DS

Point of Interest
Instead of typing in your name for your save file, you draw it with the stylus.

Developer: Konami **Publisher:** Konami **Multiplayer:** 2p versus, soul trading **Available:** October

Interview **Koji Igarashi** producer **Castlevania series**

The most challenging part of making the game was…
How to implement the touchscreen feature into the game and where the keys and buttons are used. My team and myself spent all our brainpower to make the most of the touch panel screen. It was so tough this time, as we did not have much time for development.

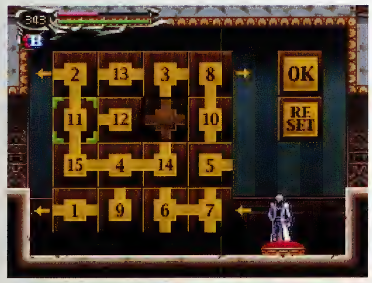
The best use of the DS' features in the game is…
The map display. It's so convenient, don't you agree?

One of the most useful souls to repeatedly collect and level up is…
Rycuda. I recommend this one. This is so useful when you collect it repeatedly.

My favorite soul ability is…
Ghost's soul is my favorite soul. It separates from the body and conducts reconnaissance. So basically, what you can do is to scroll this soul out and see the next map area. Not much use, but for some reason, I like it.

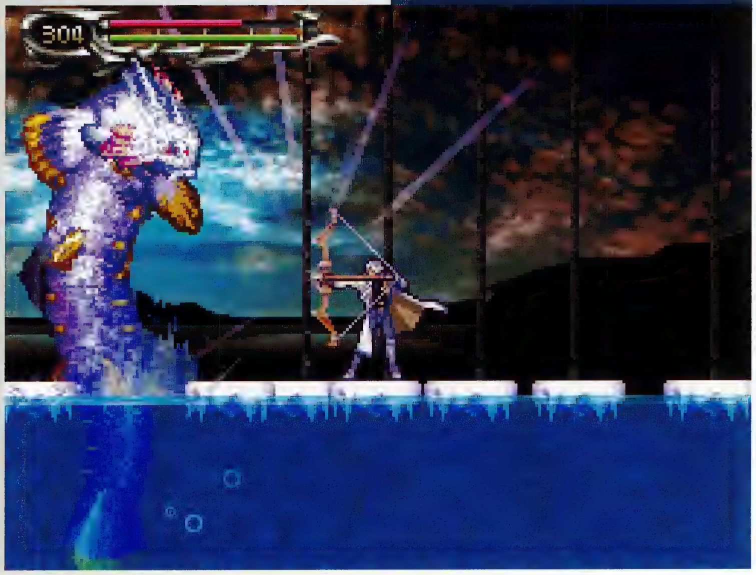
One of the most terrifying boss monsters is…
[It's a] secret [boss] if I talk about its strength! Hmm, if you only stick with terrifying boss monsters, that's Puppet Master. It's got a scary face!

We switched to a different art style because…
Simply because of Ms. [Ayami] Kojima's schedule. Aside from that, my thinking [is that] the target audience of the DS overlaps with the GBA. So, we made the decision to go with an anime style, because we wanted to also get younger audiences.



> "It was so tough this time, as we did not have much time for development."
> **Koji Igarashi** producer **Castlevania series**

Soma gains all manner of weapons and powers as he traverses the castle.



The most interesting new character is…
Stupid Dario! He's 37 and still wearing some flame-patterned leather jacket. He's a very simple and understandable character.

An idea I had but didn't use in the game is…
Whoa, I have many! A soul vendor—a machine that converts souls into particular items—is one example. Or using the touch panel to mix items up with your stylus! There are tons of things we weren't able to include in the game.

My other Castlevania plans include…
Curse of Darkness is our second attempt with 3D Castlevania. You progress through the game with your familiar, which is called an Innocent Devil. Unlike…Lament of Innocence, we have changed the camera to free camera style. The map itself is very close to Symphony of the Night, with each area inter-connected. We have various types of weapons. Now that we have allies, Innocent Devils, I'm sure the battle itself is not as lonely as before. Oh, the graphics are much enhanced this time! Please look forward to it. **play**

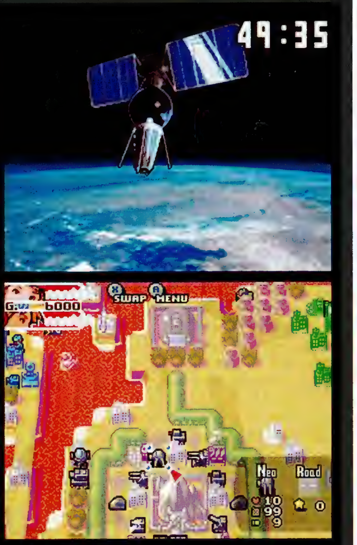
Advance Wars: Dual Strike

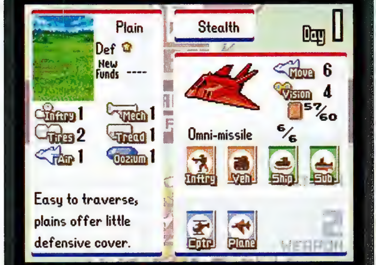
Nintendo DS

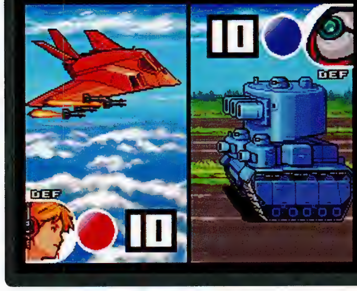
8.5 Score

Developer: Intelligent Systems **Publisher:** Nintendo **Multiplayer:** 4p versus **Available:** August

As with its GBA predecessors, Advance Wars: Dual Strike provides a remarkably deep military strategy game coated in an anime-style shell, only now with new complexities like battles on multiple fronts (thanks to the two screens) and devastating commanding officer tag powers. As before, there are loads of unit types on land, sea and air, each with their own nuances, functions and priorities, as well as resource management to consider, all adding up to fun and challenging experience. I didn't care for the sometimes so-hip-it's-not translation ("you got served" is already deader than disco), but I did like the Combat mode, which offers pure reflex-based action for the non-strategists out there. Nintendo and Intelligent Systems have struck again. **Chris Hoffman**







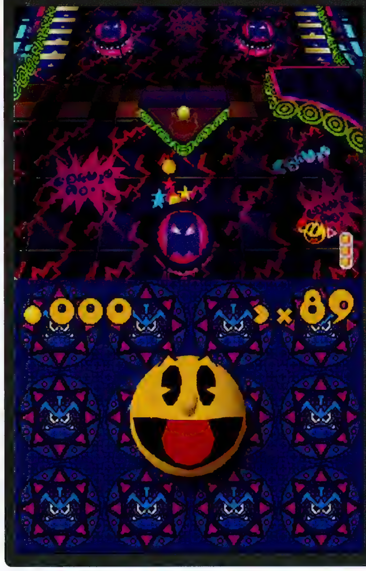
Pac'n Roll

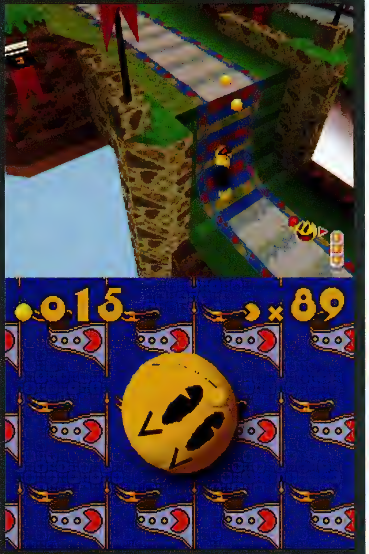
Nintendo DS

7.5 Score

Developer: Namco **Publisher:** Namco **Multiplayer:** None **Available:** August

Not only is the little yellow fellow celebrating his 25th birthday, but his latest appearance on the DS does nothing if not emulate that most classic of input methods, the trackball. It really is the '80s all over again. Using the stylus to scoot Pac-Man along just as you would spin a trackball, you maneuver through a typical smorgasbord of environments by deftly controlling momentum and direction. The levels are pretty good, making use of vertical elements as well as fast, Sonic-like sections to spice up the eating of those apparently tasty pellets (which are also needed to unlock gateways). However, unlike Yoshi's Touch and Go and Kirby: Canvas Curse, I found myself growing tired of moving Pac-Man along in this fashion. Maybe I'm just lazy. **Michael Hobbs**





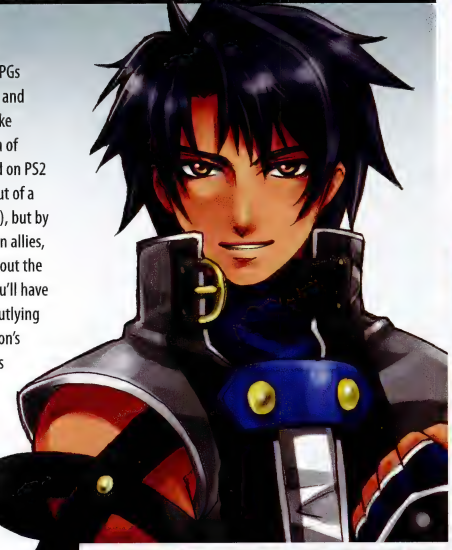
Generation of Chaos

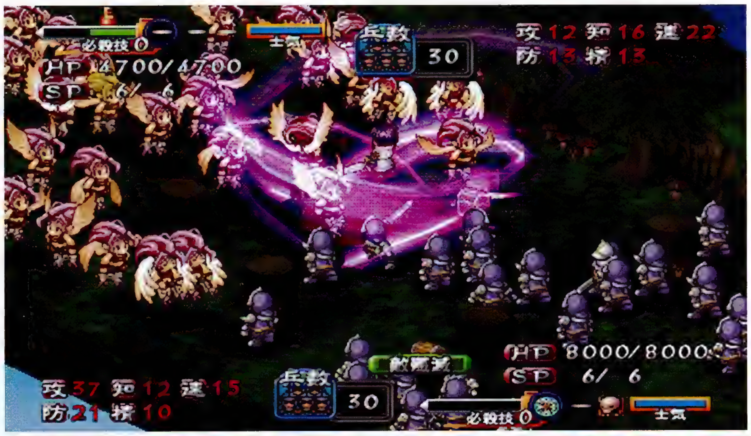
PSP

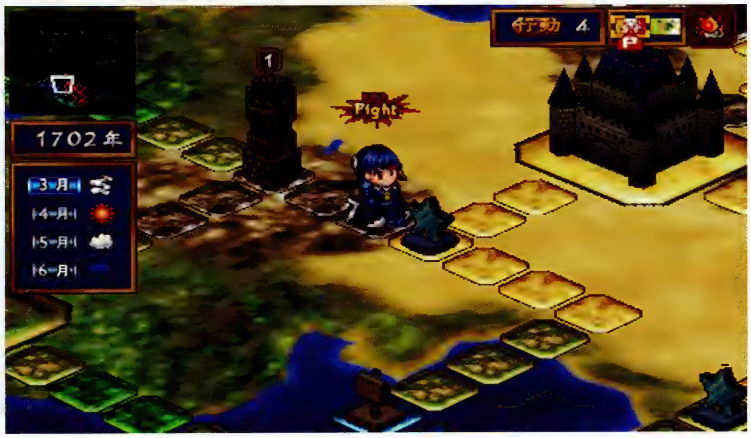
Preview

Developer: Idea Factory **Publisher:** NIS America **Multiplayer:** None **Available:** Spring 2006

The folks at NIS America have made a name for themselves by delivering top-notch strategy-RPGs with an old-school flair to American PS2 users, and now, with Generation of Chaos, they're looking to take that pedigree onto the PSP. Players begin Generation of Chaos—which just saw its fifth installment released on PS2 in Japan—in command of a single small country (out of a choice of 10, each with different stories and endings), but by using political and military skill, you'll be able to gain allies, conquer enemies and spread your influence throughout the continent. There's more to GOC than just fighting; you'll have to manage resources to build up your army, fortify outlying cities, maintain your finances and manage your nation's infrastructure all while protecting your headquarters from any potential invaders. When conflict does inevitably break out, players will be treated to battles with up to 60 characters fighting at once. Numerous formations and tactical commands can be issued to the troops, while commanders are controlled individually, with the ability to focus on specific foes and unleash powerful and graphically impressive super moves. Aside from various enemy types that affect battle strategy, players will also have to contend with changing seasons and varied weather conditions that impact gameplay. It all adds up to what promises to be one of the deepest games yet for PSP.
Chris Hoffman







touching is good.

ADVANCE WARS
DUAL STRIKE

The twisted Black Hole Army has returned, and this time you'll need both screens as the war rages on two fronts. It's up to you to command your troops on the ground, in the air and at sea as you engage in dual-screen combat in order to fend off the deadly invasion.

NINTENDO DS™

EVERYONE
E
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Cartoon Violence

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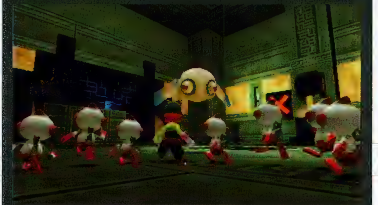
Tokobot

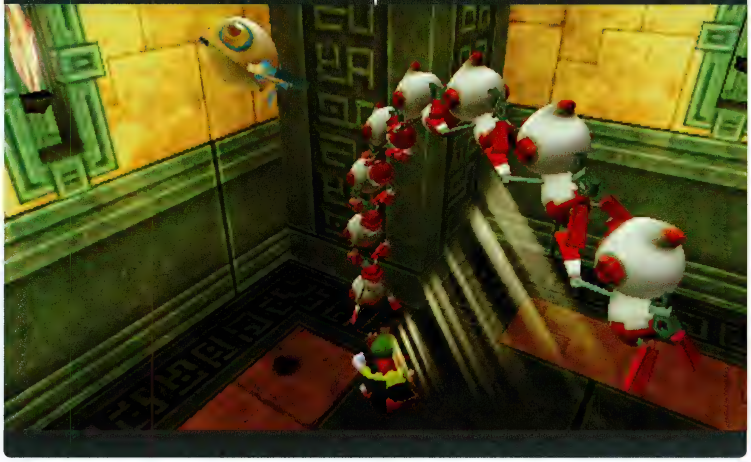
PSP

Preview

Developer: Tecmo **Publisher:** Tecmo **Multiplayer:** TBA **Available:** Fall 2005

I know what you're thinking: *"What the heck is a Tokobot?!"* Well, they're little robots that once saved the world a long time ago. . . and a young archaeologist named Bolt teams up with them to save the world again. Tecmo's action game looks gorgeous on the PSP's widescreen. . . and the gameplay looks to be quite innovative. Bolt leads a team of Tokobots to save the world, using "Karakuri combinations" to fight enemies and avoid traps. Bolt's number of Tokobots, team and Karakuri combos and difficulty level increase as you progress, making for some interesting depth of play. . . and lots of choices. From the look to the tone to the colorful characters, Tokobot is shaping up to be a fresh experience. **Ashley Esqueda**





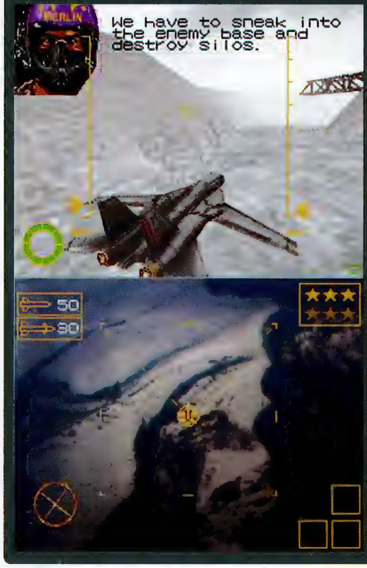
Top Gun

Nintendo DS

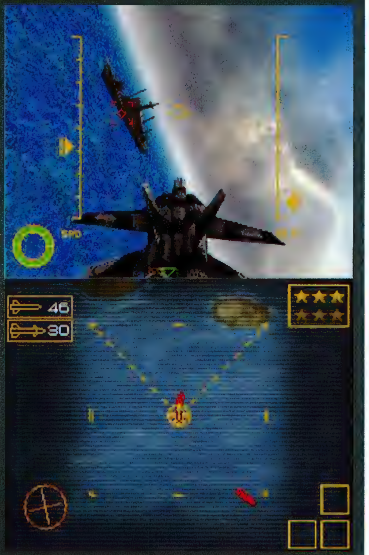
Preview

Developer: Interactive Vision **Publisher:** Mastiff **Multiplayer:** 4p versus **Available:** October

Top Gun may be arriving almost 20 years after the movie, but so far the game is shaping up as a very impressive arcade-style flight game that boasts extremely natural controls. Players can choose from fighters like the F-14 (complete with wings that pull back when you pull back on the throttle), F-16 or F/A-18 (and maybe some hidden jets as well), then take to the skies for some third- or first-person dogfights. Missions will pit pilots against land- and sea-based adversaries, as well as plenty of enemy fighters, with objectives like protecting allied bases or simply blowing away enemy targets with your missiles and machine guns. Fans of Ace Combat will feel right at home with this one. **Chris Hoffman**



We have to sneak into the enemy base and destroy silos.



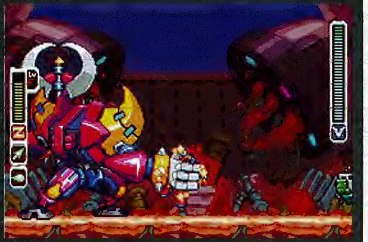
Mega Man Zero 4

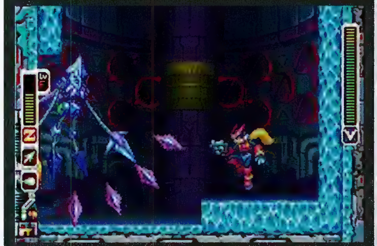
Game Boy Advance

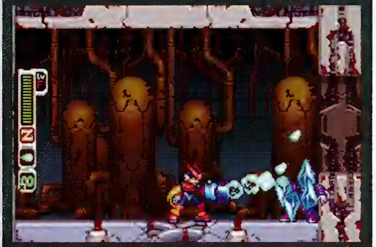
Preview

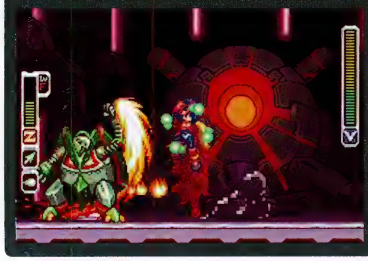
Developer: Inticreates **Publisher:** Capcom **Multiplayer:** None **Available:** October

Legendary Maverick Hunter Zero is back doing what he does best: slicing and shooting his way past waves of enemies and pattern-heavy bosses while traversing some of the most challenging obstacle-filled stages that gaming has ever seen. Naturally, new additions augment the successful formula, like the Zero Knuckle weapon that steals enemies' abilities right then and there, the option to create new chips by combining parts from defeated enemies, and a weather system that changes stage layouts and difficulty, such as when snow covers spiked pits, making them crossable. Perhaps the biggest change is a new Easy Mode, hopefully attracting players scared by the series' infamous difficulty. The story, which has some interesting ties to the X series, is also a highlight. **Chris Hoffman**









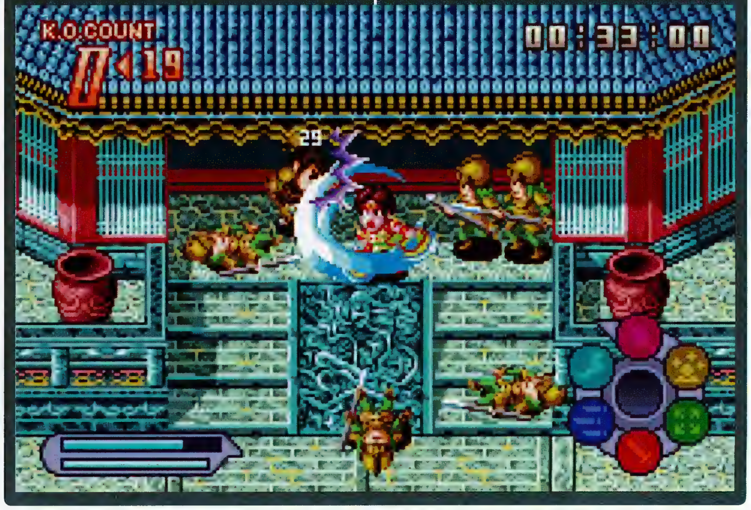
Dynasty Warriors Advance

7.0
Score

Game Boy Advance

Developer: Koei **Publisher:** Nintendo **Multiplayer:** None **Available:** August

The GBA simply can't create the legions of enemies and nonstop 3D action that the Dynasty Warriors series is known for, so Dynasty Warriors Advance doesn't even try. Instead, we're treated to 2D top-down battles delivered in small portions, and it works—in some ways, better than the more technologically powerful versions of the game. Like in the PSP version, an overhead map really adds a more strategic feel to the game, and although the fighting options are limited to a few simple combos and power-ups, the quick battles prevent it from becoming monotonous. Console version fans should perhaps approach with caution, but I had quite an enjoyable time—except for a few cheap bosses with inescapable attacks that cause automatic death. **Chris Hoffman**



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JEWEL QUEST
Back
Pause

Jewel Quest

Jump into an adventure with Jewel Quest, a Java technology-based game that takes place in the heart of the jungle! Uncover ancient ruins and lost civilizations. In this unique new take on the classic-style matching game, you must rearrange valuable relics to turn sand tiles into gold. Increasingly difficult puzzles contain secret twists, cursed items and buried artifacts!

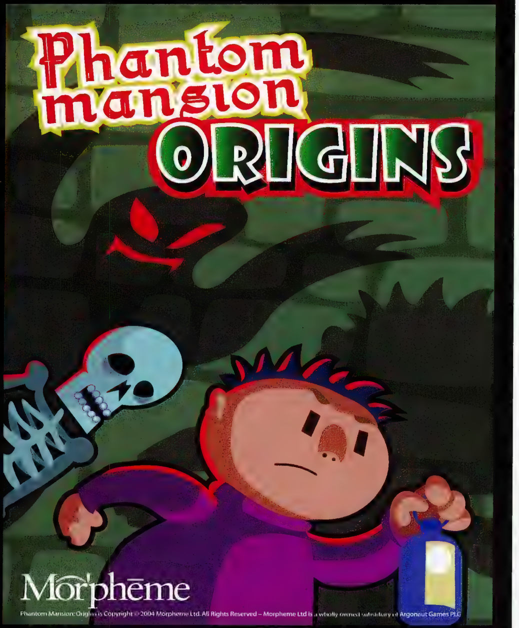
Publisher: I-play

SIMON
Bummer
Groovy!
Quit

SIMON

The classic '80s memory game with the disco flair "beeps" and "boops" its way to mobile this Christmas! One of the most recognizable toys of all time, SIMON Mobile is an ideal mobile game that will challenge and entertain memory buffs of all ages. Sporting the familiar red, yellow, blue and green lights, SIMON Mobile features the original SIMON gameplay combined with innovative new features designed specifically for the mobile platform.

Publisher: Glu Mobile


Phantom mansion ORIGINS
Morphēme
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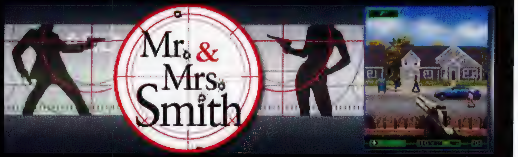
Phantom Mansion Origins

Hector the Spectre Detector returns in Phantom Mansion Origins! Solve the mysteries and assist Hector in his quest to lay the ghosts of the Phantom Mansion to rest. Collect skulls of power by evading evil enemies, collecting keys, penetrating portals and avoiding the abyss!

Publisher: Morpheme Ltd.



Mr. & Mrs. Smith

The Mr. & Mrs. Smith mobile sharpshooting game uses Java technology and provides the ultimate battle of the sexes. This slick suburban spy shootout game lets you kill bad guys and save your marriage all in a day's work! Use recon technology to distinguish undercover agents from innocent civilians. Once your targets are marked, let the bullets fly! However, if you draw first blood, you'd better prepare for your espionage, because your opposition will target you!

Publisher: Glu Mobile

Desktop Adventures

WildSnake Arcade: Invasion Waves

No more bricks, no more breaks! Invasion Waves uses Java technology to deliver an outer space version of the game Breakout! Fight against tiny aliens and big, evil monsters to complete the wave showdowns and save the universe!

Publisher: WildSnake™ Software

3D 8-Ball Pool

Chalk up your cue for a Java technology-based game of 3D 8-Ball Pool! Play online in this realistic multiplayer environment that includes online chat. Compete in tournaments, beat the champions, play friends online or challenge a stranger. You can also try to improve your game using the Practice mode.

Publisher: FlyOrDie Online Games

3D 8-BALL POOL

Tech Center

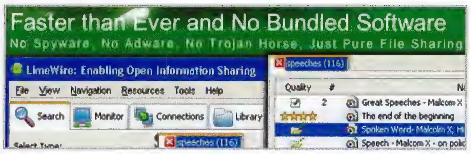
Ki-Bi

Your favorite games, tones and more—just one click away! Ki-Bi Mobile Technologies Ltd. has developed the innovative Ki-Bi™ card. The Ki-Bi™ card is a low-cost, mass-market, credit card-sized electronic device with active buttons on it. Use the Ki-Bi™ card to get any mobile content, such as Java™ games, top ringtones and more. Operation is easy, immediate and fun. Point the card at your phone and click the button of your choice—the content you desire immediately appears on your handset. The Ki-Bi™ card can be used over and over again, and content items are updated weekly. You can also share mobile content with your friends. Simply click the "Send to a Friend" button, and your friends will receive tones or games to their handsets. Now, you have your own mobile content dispenser, in your pocket, with a weekly update.

Publisher: Ki-Bi Mobile Technology

Killer Desktop App

LimeWire

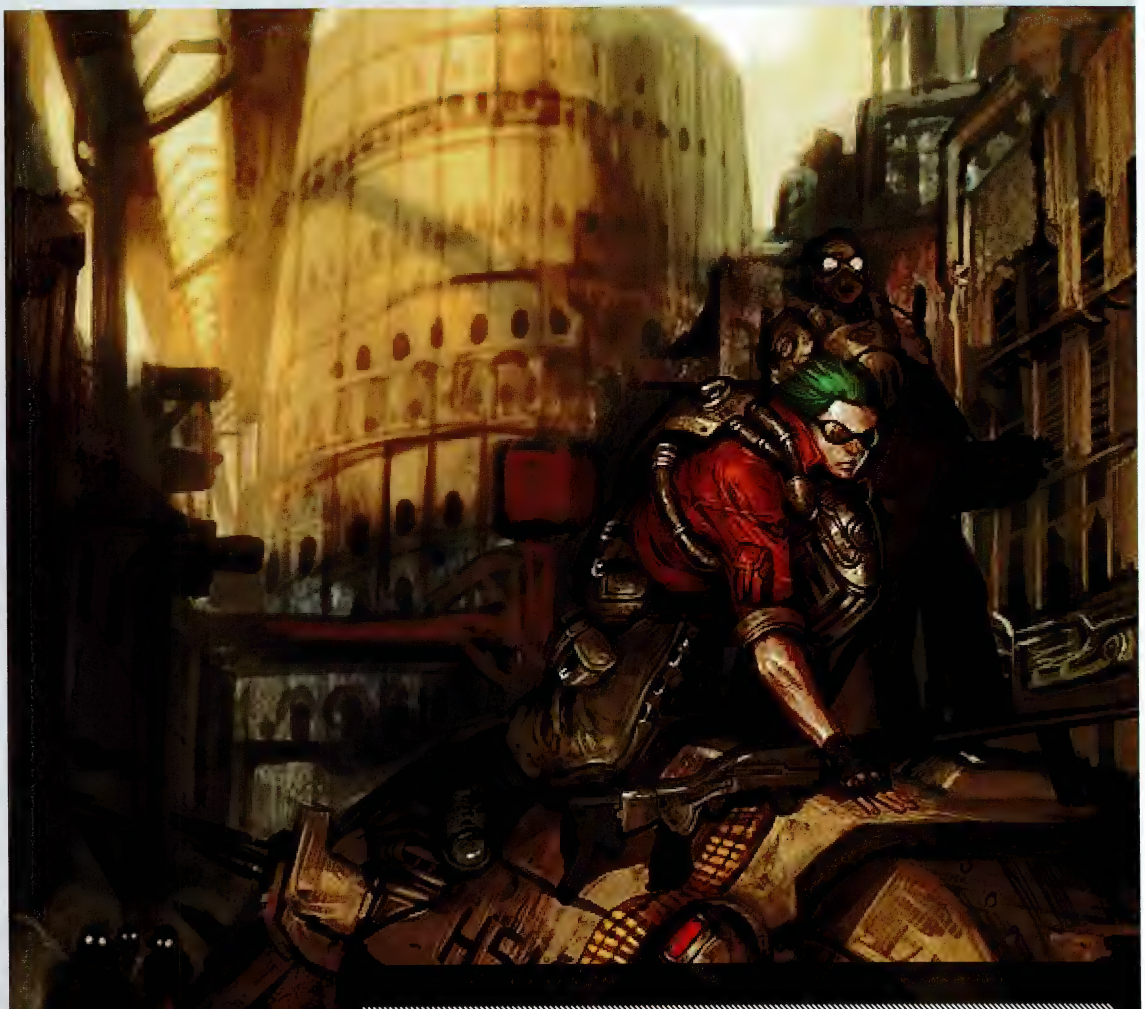

Faster than Ever and No Bundled Software

No Spyware, No Adware, No Trojan Horse, Just Pure File Sharing

LimeWire: Enabling Open Information Sharing

LimeWire, written in the Java programming language, is the fastest P2P file-sharing program on the planet! Share files of any format, including audio, video, image and document. LimeWire is user-friendly and safe. It has no spyware, adware or trojan horses—just pure file sharing. Get the basic version for free! Visit magnetmix.com and find out how LimeWire helps artists share original music, art and films with the world!

Publisher: LimeWire LLC



Preview

Huxley

On a mission to redefine the persistent online FPS

It's one of the few titles guaranteed to push your PC or Xbox 360 to its limits in 2006, from a company that is quietly climbing towards elite status in the industry. Huxley represents the next-generation of massively multiplayer online first person shooters, and consistent with other highly ambitious MMO projects in production at Webzen, the company is placing an unprecedented focus on striking visuals. We probe past Huxley's stunning exterior with H-Studio producer Kijong Kang. **Mike Griffin**

Huxley

PC, Xbox 360

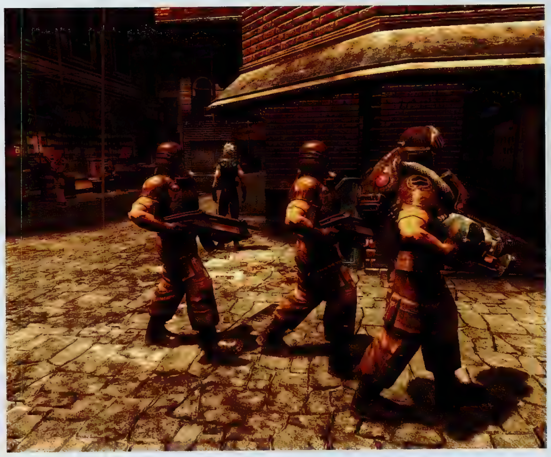
Preview

Point of Interest

Xbox Live doesn't support a full MMO model (yet), so the 360 Huxley will likely use Webzen's custom servers.

Developer: Webzen **Publisher:** Webzen
Online: Massively Multiplayer **Available:** Q2 2006

Below: Huxley's towns, for the most part, are not lawless societies. It's advisable to behave in the presence of roving patrols.



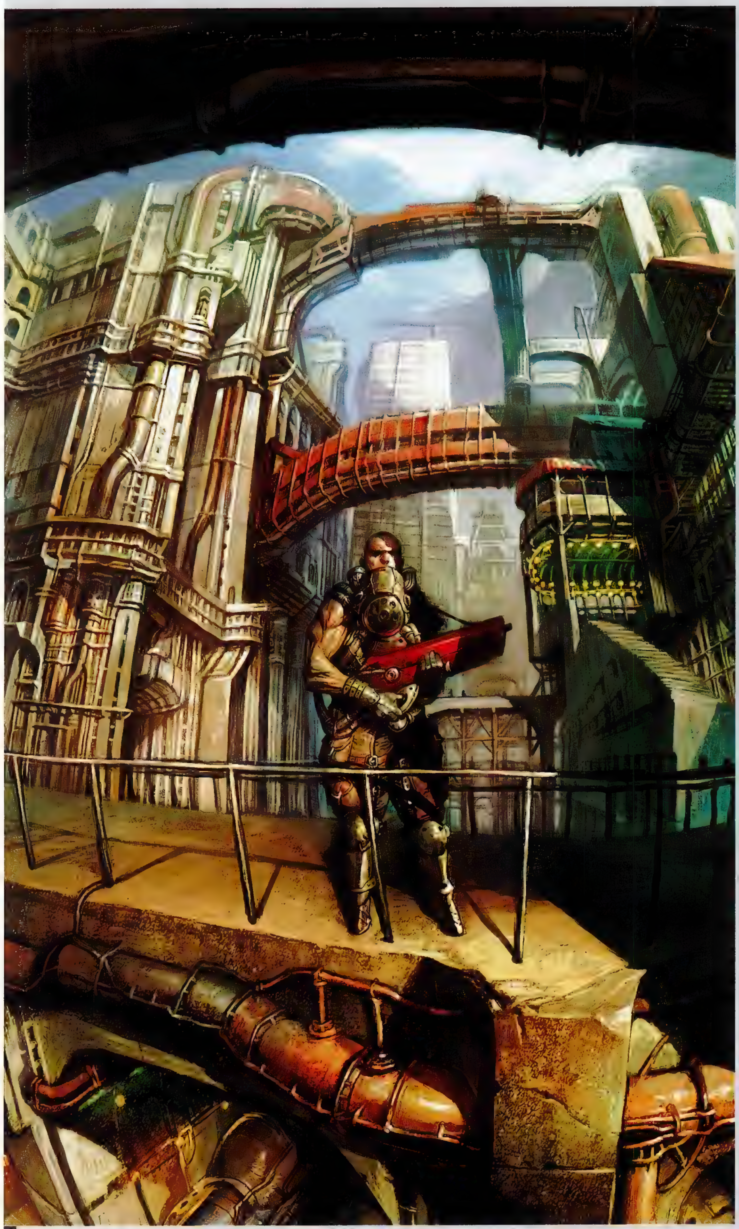
Interview

Kijong Kang, producer, H-Studio

play: What kind of experience does your team have?
Kijong Kang: We have a great blend of experienced developers who come from various backgrounds, including much experience with both MMOs and FPS games.

Huxley's story involves a struggle for control of resources. Was this theme influenced by any current world problems?
We set Huxley in the future, after a terrible turmoil has struck the world. Huxley's cities are built on the ruins of old cities—big cities like where we live today. The post-apocalyptic setting is not meant to be satirical or reflect reality—it's merely meant to be incredibly immersive and fun. When sitting down and crafting the story for Huxley, we wanted to create a world that would be gritty and provide great stories and plotlines while allowing for fun gameplay for people who love first-person shooters. We found the answer in creating a story that is not necessarily a reasonable picture of our future, nor a completely alien picture.

What factions will the player encounter in Huxley, and how do they affect the story?
Some are secret cult associations, others are extremist groups, and there is even a big munitions company that is bent on taking over the world's economy. All of these various groups tie in closely with the storyline and will add the flavor of single-player role-playing to this MMOFPS.



"With the right equipment and unique physical features, every character will have their own distinctive appearance."

Kijong Kang, producer, H-Studio

Huxley's art style seems to combine the intimidating curves of baroque with rigid early 20th-century industrial and far-off sci-fi. What kind of guidelines did your artists have?
We worked on a number of such visual concepts to flesh out the feel of the art style. Eventually, our talented group of concept artists understood that we needed both familiar surroundings and our own unique design—and their understanding embodied Huxley's power systems and struggle for energy sources.

Huxley's weapons and armor seem to follow this principle. Will each faction have slightly different technology?
Of course! The weapons, vehicles and various types of armor are designed under the same guidelines as that of the world. Huxley has two distinctive races—Sapiens and Alternatives—which utilize the energy differently. Sapiens use the pure energy source Lunarites in solid form, whereas Alternatives need the energy in fluid form. Because of these differences, the two races have different power systems and overall design.

Does the Unreal Engine 3 pack enough power to illustrate your concepts of Huxley's world?
In truth, we have found that the Unreal Engine 3 has helped us to show more than what we expected to be able to show of the Huxley world. It is truly helping us to strengthen the overall development of the game and the world. The engine's outstanding performance capability and Webzen's server technology are combining to allow us to create astonishing in-game environments for this MMOFPS.

What kind of new experiences will Huxley offer to regular FPS players?
Huxley has all the combat and battle components that FPS players love, but it also has vigorous character development and social influences that affect your character in the world. We want the users to feel as if they are in a complete wartime virtual world. Gamers will find that being a member of Huxley's society is far different from a mere FPS quickie frag-fest.

We understand that players will be able to save elements of their character while offline...
Unlike traditional single-player games with online components, persistent world games store user data on game servers. In Huxley, a player will have his or her character waiting for them in exactly the same state they were in when they last logged out—complete with all their XP, gear and weapons.

Like most modern FPS titles, Huxley has vehicles. How do players earn the right to own and drive them?
Players will need to level up their characters in order to obtain the necessary licenses to drive certain vehicles. It adds a nice RPG element to the game. Players can choose which license he or she will acquire through the game. And just like in real life, if a player's character does not have a driver's license and cannot drive a vehicle, they can still ride along in a passenger seat. This will help to encourage teamwork, especially going into battle.

What kind of gamer will excel at Huxley's PvP combat, and what happens when you get killed?
Combat in Huxley will be like a powerful, hyper FPS rather than a military FPS game. Think of games like Unreal Tournament and Quake III that are based on the fragmasters ruling. We are leaning more to rewarding the twitch game masters without penalizing the dead. Player character respawn points will vary depending on the combat field where the player last dared to tread. Those points are expected to be a major volcano amongst the strategic hot spots.

In the regular campaign, what kind of obstacles will players face in missions?
Huxley has intriguing quests, ranging from hack and slash to defending against NPCs to strategic quests that require cooperation with other players.

Will these missions include an overarching storyline?
Huxley does have various quests and missions that resemble the ones in single-player story campaigns, but we prefer to not go into detail about them at this time.

Having a distinctive online identity is important. How will Huxley allow players to make their characters unique?
Player characters will change and progress constantly in the game world. Characters are fully customizable with a vast array of face shapes, hairstyles, skin tones, etc., which players will determine when they create their characters. With the right equipment and unique physical features, every character will have their own distinctive appearance.

These days, online players consume game content *very* quickly. What kind of plan do you have to keep Huxley fresh?
That is a common concern for anyone who makes an MMO: having enough content to satisfy the power gamers. We are planning several ways to keep players excited about Huxley. For example, you'll see a number of story- and content-driven elements updated regularly and constant weapon and combat field and map updates for new, ongoing combat experiences. **play**

Preview

SUN

Stem the tide of unquenchable evil

SUN stands for "Soul of the Ultimate Nation," a title that reflects the struggle at the heart of the game's story. At first glance, SUN is a game with an identity crisis: is it a full-scale MMO? Is it an action-RPG with persistent elements? Does it focus on PvE or PvP gameplay? We talked design with SUN's project lead, producer In-Kyung Hong, to get these questions answered. **Mike Griffin**

SUN

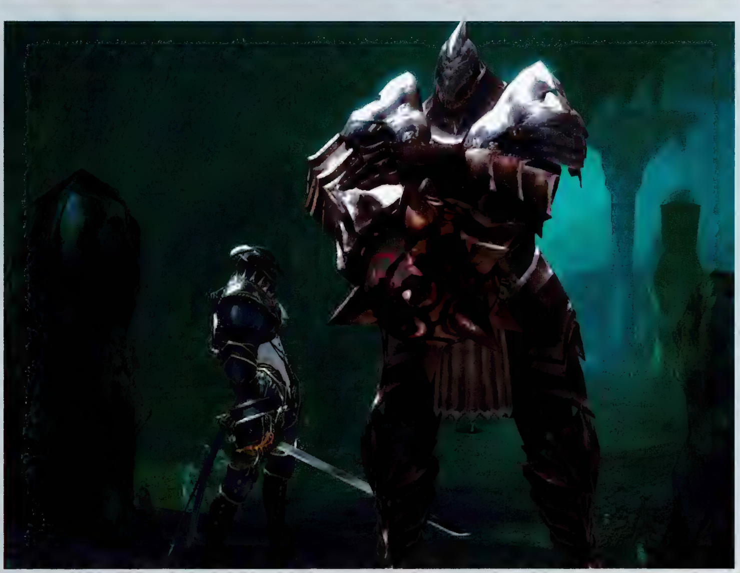
PC

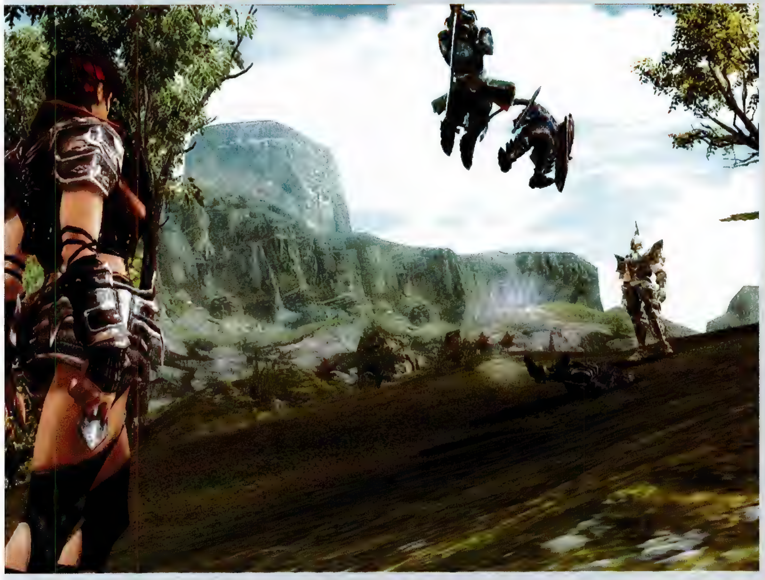
Preview

Point of Interest

SUN is shining in Korea as its beta phase proceeds. The long test period will benefit North American players later this year.

Developer: Webzen **Publisher:** Webzen
Online: Massively multiplayer **Available:** Q4 2005





SUN's outdoor zones will be vast, but they are designed more as battlegrounds than hubs of exploration.

Interview

In-Kyung Hong, Producer, SUN Studio

play: Have any other games you played inspired SUN's design?
In-Kyung Hong: I can't really say that any one game in particular inspired SUN, but I got some of the combat ideas from single-player RPGs that I played and really enjoyed in the middle and late '90s.

What's the background story of SUN's fantasy world?
The main storyline of SUN relates to the war between the Geist Empire—ruled by the Immortal Emperor Schwarz—and the resistance force called the Guidence. The Geist Empire has ruled the Blandis continent for 500 years. Possessing secret knowledge of the essence of nature known as Ether, Emperor Schwarz converted the precious Ether into dark energy and used it to conquer the entire continent. The continued extraction of Ether has impoverished the land, so the Empire army has turned its eyes towards the rich lands of neighboring nations. With insurrection inevitable, a rebel leader, Ignis, has formed the elite Guidence force and declared war against the Empire.

Do you play as one of the good guys, and will the story be meaningful to gameplay and progress?
Yes, gamers play as one of the members of the Guidence. There are five very different playable characters in SUN. The classes, jobs, genders and more are tied to the characters themselves, and the entire story of SUN unfolds through missions. Players will have to complete missions to continue the game. Throughout the course of the game, players can develop their characters by distributing points, similar to Diablo.

So SUN uses a traditional action-RPG character selection instead of a full-blown MMO multi-race/class scenario. Who are the fantastic five?
The Berserker is a warrior with enormous strength; the Dragon Knight is the descendent of the noble dragon tribe; the Shadow is a magician with strong demon powers; and the Valkyrie is the weapons specialist with high agility. The fifth character, the Elementalist, has the ability to use ancient magic with the four elements of nature.

Can one of these five be considered the game's main character?
In the context of SUN's story, the Dragon Knight is the most attractive character. The dragon tribe once had huge power but was exiled to the border areas of the Brakion continent and lost their power to Emperor Schwarz. The Dragon Knight is proud of his noble blood and has an intense desire to retrieve its sealed power.

So this Dragon Knight might possess the "Soul" of the Ultimate Nation… Let's switch gears to gameplay: is SUN's combat closer to a hack-and-slash action-RPG or is it more like a traditional MMO?
The fundamental combat system

is hack-and-slash. Users can use both the keyboard and mouse to make the character move and attack simultaneously. There are various area-of-effect attacks that characters can use in addition to the single targeting method in combat. Targeting can easily be switched during combat.

What kind of effect do character stats have on this action-based fighting?
There are seven kinds of stats in the game: Strength, Dexterity, Stamina, Mentality, Spirit, Mastery 1 and Mastery 2. The stat points all factor into how your character will perform in combat. The effects of each stat are similar to what you would find in other MMOs, but in SUN, each has much more bearing on your character's ability to fight.

What if you prefer wielding magic to hacking and slashing?
Players will find magic in SUN by acquiring mana. When a player gains mana, they will take on magic similar to traditional RPGs, gaining additional magic systems for attacks, support, replenishment and specials.

One of SUN's big features involves customizing mission parameters prior to entering. How does this work?
It's a little early to be talking in-depth about how the missions and quests work, but we can tell you that you will have some degree of control over the level and distribution of enemies. Also, the amount of experience and money rewards can be customized as well.

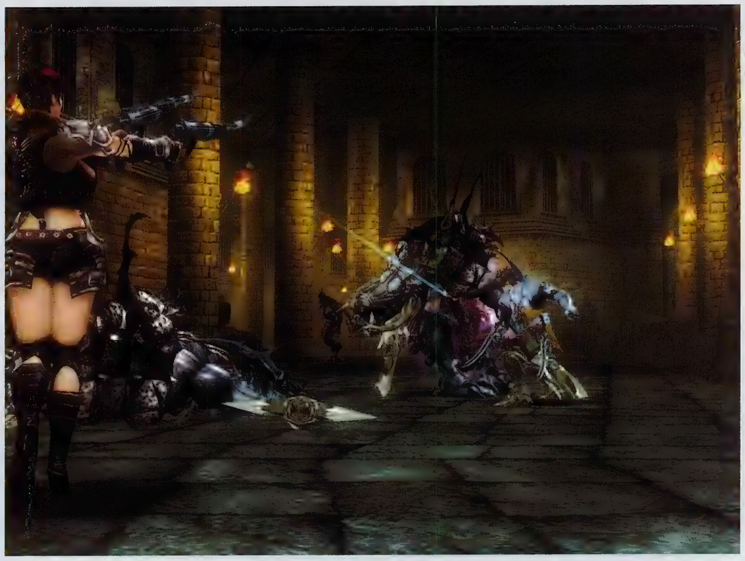
What kind of system will SUN use to help players find compatible groups and cooperate together?
We plan to support most of the online game systems found in traditional MMOs. Players will be able to have separate lists to help communicate with friends, parties and guilds.

How much of the world area is made for large numbers of players to socialize, and how much of the world will focus on intricate private missions for smaller groups?
Because SUN utilizes a zone system, the world is not immensely vast like many landscape-based MMOs. Villages and combat fields are separated, and each large village should be able to accommodate from 500 to 1,000 players at the same time. The combat fields, however, are a lot like 3D action games where the maps are pretty complex.

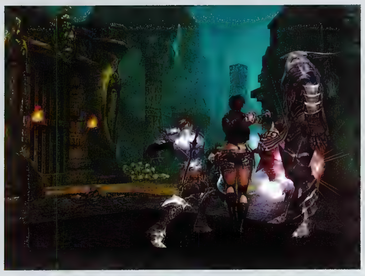
The artwork in SUN is very attractive. How does the game's engine technology allow your artists to achieve their vision of the world?
Using recently developed techniques such as normal mapping, glowing effects, self-shadow effects, reflection effects and environment mapping, among others, we have been able to achieve a high level of graphic detail in SUN to create an original fantasy world.

How meaningful is it to have an amazing musician like Howard Shore composing the game's soundtrack?
Working with Howard Shore was exciting and extremely interesting. The more I interacted with him, the more I came to think about the convergence of art and gameplay, and how bringing his music together with our game design will make an immersive experience for players.

Finally, let's talk about SUN's player versus player system. What type of PvP combat will be available?
In SUN, we won't have pure PvP, but we will have elements of dueling, guild and siege battles. We chose this structure because very often PvP can have a negative effect [on the game], resulting in an overabundance of PKs (Player Killers). Thus, players killing each other in battle zones while fighting against monsters—and in the villages—has been totally blocked. Instead, we implemented a satisfying duel system to provide SUN players with an outlet for PvP. **play**



Above: The primary female ranged fighter wields dart revolvers with increasingly potent accuracy while her melee cohorts deal damage up close.



> "Working with Howard Shore was exciting… The more I interacted with him, the more I came to think about the convergence of art and gameplay…"
>
> In-Kyung Hong, Producer, SUN Studio

Review

Dungeon Siege 2

Enduring gameplay with surprising depth

Recommended system specs	
OS: Windows XP	Video: GeForce 5900/Radeon 9600
Processor: 2.0 GHz CPU	Sound: DirectSound
Memory: 512 MB RAM	Internet: Broadband

There's a reason why Diablo became such a hugely popular game: there is something about this style of action-RPG, and the original Dungeon Siege sort of blatantly ripped it off, that speaks to the best qualities of classic role-playing and frenetic button-mashing. What Gas Powered Games brings to the table with Dungeon Siege 2 is an extremely content-rich extension of this design with more role-playing and quest elements than ever before.

Dungeon Siege 2 is all about depth and breadth and a monstrous reserve of game content. There's lore and detail here for just about everything: an ever-growing bestiary, quest and atlas logs that chronicle your every step and plenty of idiosyncratic character development in the vein of Baldur's Gate. This part of the game has received as much fleshing-out as DS2's stat-based character development, which, again, bears the hallmarks of care and balance. Unlike the Diablos and previous Dungeon Siege entries, DS2's archetype and class trees provide a better opportunity to mold specific sub-classes of ranged, melee or spell-casting characters. If developing your party's stats and abilities isn't keeping you occupied, there's a ridiculous amount of weaponry, armor and enchanting to keep you pleasantly obsessed over the main 50-hour campaign.

In terms of basic control and action gameplay, Dungeon Siege 2 does not mess with a good thing. It's still that familiar targeting click-fest, and all the usual movement and camera controls are back. Party and especially pet management have been enhanced, and juggling your special abilities has been simplified. DS2 really isn't one of the better-looking PC titles released this year, but there's certainly enough impact in its presentation to infuse the action with a rewarding feel. Between its unquestionable depth, addicting action and secure online party-based multiplayer modes, you can't go wrong with Dungeon Siege 2. **Mike Griffin**

Dungeon Siege 2

PC

8.0 Score

○ Tons of content, story and incidental lore. New class-tree design breaks the linear precedent of other PC action-RPGs.

☒ Low-poly models and some dubious texture sets have some of the game's presentation looking incongruous in late 2005.

Developer: Gas Powered Games **Publisher:** Microsoft Game Studios
Online: 4p Classic, 3p Couples, 2p Party **Available:** August

> "There's lore and detail here for just about everything..."

Preview

Cold War

Reveal the truth behind the curtain

It's kind of surprising that it has taken this long to stage an action-adventure title in the shadow of the Iron Curtain. Much of this dark era was teeming with government scandal. The late '80s communist Soviet Union is the setting for DreamCatcher's forthcoming Cold War. As Matt Carter, you play an ambitious American freelance journalist following a lead to Russia in hopes of exposing political corruption. The game has a Splinter Cell kind of vibe, but Matt is more apt to knock out and tranquilize foes in lieu of snapping necks. There's an interesting inventory system for mixing chemical and material items into sedatives or non-lethal ammo, and the main interface—using uncomplicated context menus—deftly supports Cold War's blend of stealth and suppression. Despite being on the run in hostile territory, Matt never loses sight of his objective, and Cold War unfolds an increasingly complex tale of deception. **Mike Griffin**

Cold War

PC

Preview

Point of Interest

You will be able to explore Lubyanka, the former U.S.S.R.'s notorious KGB prison, early on in Cold War.

Developer: Mindware Studios **Publisher:** DreamCatcher Interactive
Online: None **Available:** Q4 2005

Preview

Myst V: Ends of Ages

Fading away in top form

Myst V looks impressive, even at this stage. The linear, puzzle-filled game also makes an attempt to bring in new Myst players, offering varied movement options: free WASD roaming or traditional point-and-click movement. The gameplay's changed a bit, adding an in-game camera that Esher can use to take pictures of clues, and also a slate that Esher can etch on to manipulate his surroundings to solve puzzles. Myst V's story looks like it's going to be another complex, intricately woven tale...and graphically, the game is incredible. Cyan Worlds has decided to "film" and then superimpose animations onto the characters' faces…and it's nothing short of incredible. Watching Yeesha talk to Esher while her subsequent expressions of sadness, wistfulness and anger shift on her face is truly a sight to behold. Myst V is getting ready to bring the popular franchise to a close, and it's going out in style. **Ashley Esqueda**

Myst V: End of Ages

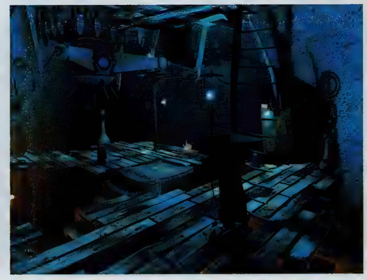
PC

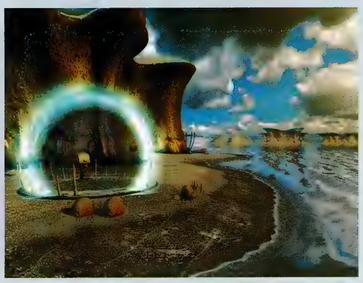
Preview

Point of Interest

Cyan Worlds' Rand and Robyn Miller introduced the original Myst back in 1985, creating a new benchmark in the adventure genre.

Developer: Cyan Worlds **Publisher:** Ubisoft
Online: None **Available:** September

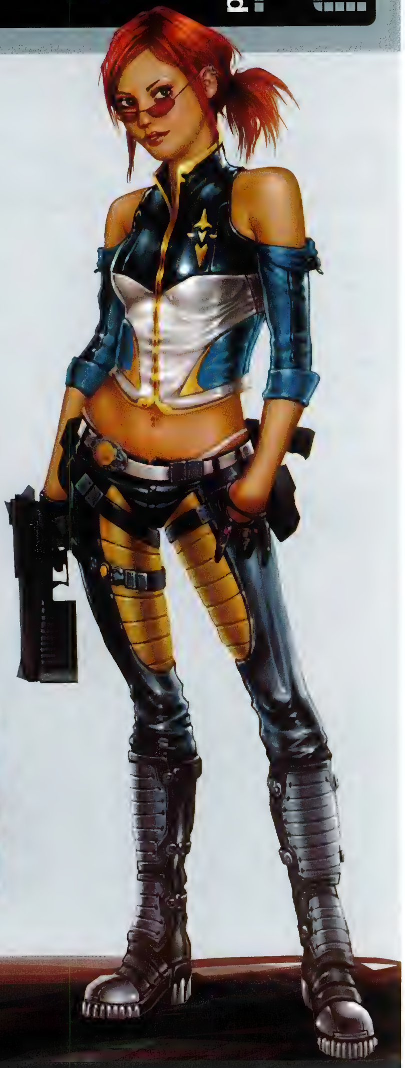




Preview

SiN Episodes: Emergence

A new design paradigm for a new era



Is there room in this industry for an independent developer to maintain 100 percent ownership of a hot IP, self-fund a top-tier first-person shooter using one of the most sophisticated licensed engines, and deliver a cohesive franchise-driven action epic every few months in true episodic format? Ritual Entertainment believes in this vision for their SiN property, and Valve is lending them the tools to make SiN Episodes a reality.

Attempting something so far removed from the norm is certainly a leap of faith, but as Ritual CEO Steve Nix told Play, "The traditional model discourages risk taking. We are partnered with Valve to create a new business model." Ritual's SiN Episodes: Emergence will be the first Steam-distributed installment of an ongoing series. Taking place in 2042 in a Freeport City now recovering from the events of the first two SiN games, Emergence will feature the return of John R. Blade and his HardCorps strike force, once again on the tail of Elexis Sinclaire—the brilliant and sexy billionaire scientist and head of SinTEK Research. Despite scattered reports of mutants (thanks to Ms. Sinclaire's obsession with reshaping humanity), SinTEK has somehow mollified city officials and resumed operations. A new rookie on the force, the feisty stealth infiltration expert Jessica Cannon, will be introduced in the first episode, set to flow down the Steam pipeline later this year.

SiN Episodes will be powered by the same technology that brought Half-Life 2 to life; however, as Ritual's community lead Steve Hessel explains, the Source engine has been tweaked for Episodes: "We now have damage zones for vehicles, so it's possible to shoot the doors off a car or to blow out the windows. We also added a new system dubbed Context Look, which allows NPC characters to react to what the player is looking at. Let's say Blade is looking for a certain device in a cluttered room. Our system will allow JC to go 'Nope, that's not it, that's just a toaster,' or 'Keep looking, those oranges aren't going to help you.' Not to mention, Jessica might get a little annoyed if you don't look at her face while she's talking."

In addition to this innovative handling of the perspective in an action game, Episodes will have physics objects moving and pivoting realistically from the player's hands instead of hovering in the center of the screen. Ritual is also expanding their AI to a more system-driven approach that recognizes physics and adapts to the player; allied characters might help teammates get back to their feet or drag them to cover. And even when an enemy is too injured to stand on his own, he might still be able to raise a weapon.

With new episodes appearing every three or four months, Ritual can change the very fabric of the SiN world—or allow their players to do so. This is where Action-Based Outcomes (ABOs) play a key role. ABOs are the result of crux-point action situations where you make a major decision (flipping a switch to flood an area, torching a building, etc.) and it directly affects what you experience in later content. Ritual is even considering specific community-level ABOs: if enough players choose one critical decision, the results become a global outcome that alter events in future episodes.

We asked Ritual's renowned designer, Richard "Levelord" Gray, how he felt about this opportunity to expand the SiN franchise into the sprawling action series of Episodes. In a moment of serene conviction most uncommon for this jovial fellow, he answered: "My dream, and I think it is shared by everyone here, is to spend the rest of my professional days updating the SiN universe." This kind of dream may be a wake-up call to a stagnating industry. **Mike Griffin**

SiN Episodes: Emergence

PC

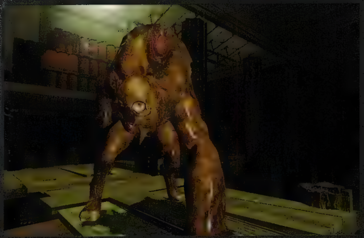
Preview

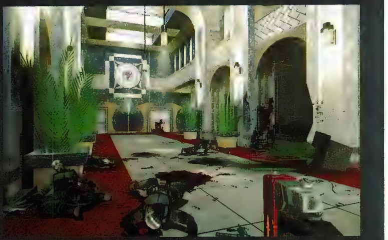
Point of Interest

SiN was primed to dominate 1998, then a little title by the name of Half-Life came along and snatched the spotlight away...

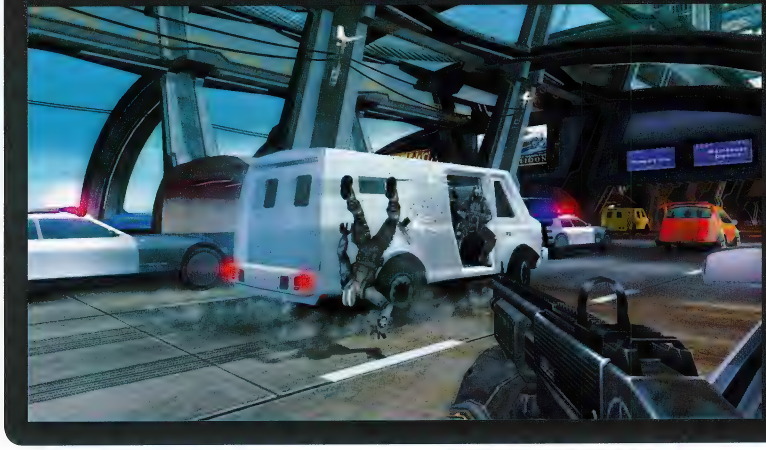
Developer: Ritual Entertainment **Publisher:** Valve (via Steam)
Online: Deathmatch **Available:** Fall 2005

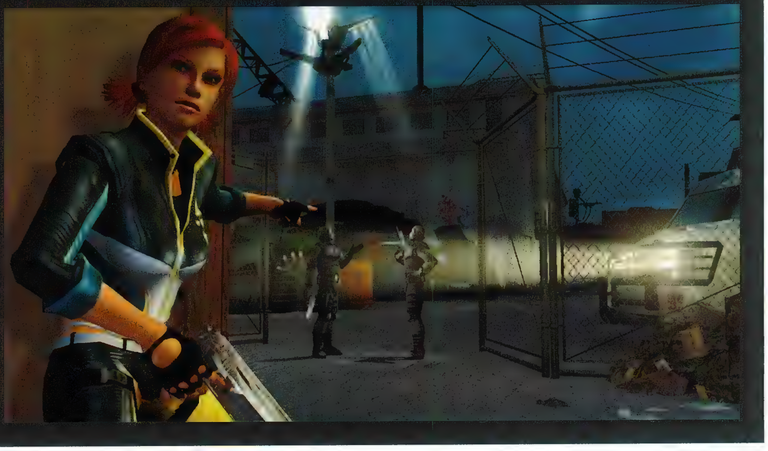
> "Ritual can change the very fabric of the SiN world—or allow their players to do so..."





Above: Looks like the SinTEK welcoming committee had a very bad day.





Victory in sight for Day of Defeat: Source

After months of delays, it looks like Day of Defeat: Source will finally see a release in September. The popular WW2 mod was initially scheduled for a quick and dirty port to Source—with only minor enhancements—during Half-Life 2's release in late 2004. That idea was scrapped and the project returned to the garage for an overhaul. DoD:S skipped its next scheduled release after a spring beta test didn't pan out, so Valve decided to spend the entire summer polishing the visuals while—hold on to your helmets, DoD vets—tweaking elements of the gameplay. Already a very good WW2 shooter in its classic form, the Source-powered Day of Defeat could be a surprising hit this fall.

RESTAURANT
CAFE

Valve and EA ink publishing deal; fans blow Steam out their ears

When news arrived of a publishing agreement between EA and Valve, Gabe Newell fans all across the world let out a collective cry, followed by weeping lamentations of innocence lost. OK, so that didn't happen. However, it was big news, and die-hard Valve fans weren't exactly enamored with the notion of their favorite development house joining ranks with EA. We checked in with Valve to clarify matters, and it turns out that the partnership, while tremendously beneficial for both parties, doesn't actually run too deep. It's quite unlike the previous Valve-Vivendi deal. Most importantly, Valve will continue to self-fund (and therefore maintain complete control of) development. Not every developer has this luxury, but it is certainly the best way to guarantee creative autonomy. The Steam service also remains Valve's business and a platform for others to publish their works to directly. Regarding EA's role, it is simply a case of retail reach. Our Valve insider sums it up best: "As I'm sure you already know, having boxes at retail just makes good sense if you're able. And we're very fortunate to work with someone who's very good at getting boxes onto shelves." In Source and Steam news, Ritual Entertainment has announced SiN Episodes: Emergence (see preview this issue). The new series will use the Half-Life 2 engine and shoot straight into players' homes through Steam for around $20 bucks an episode.

NPD PC Game Sales

Week of July 10 - July 16

01. Battlefield 2 - EA
02. World Of Warcraft- VU Games
03. Guild Wars- NCsoft
04. The Sims 2 - EA
05. The Sims 2: University Expansion Pack - EA
06. The Sims Deluxe - EA
07. Roller Coaster Tycoon 3 - Atari
08. The Sims: Unleashed Expansion Pack - EA
09. Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas - Rockstar Games (Take 2)
10. Half-Life 2 - VU Games

Introducing Ghost Widow: A City of Villains signature villain

Ghost Widow is one of the top lieutenants in the service of Lord Recluse, the sinister leader of City of Villains' Rogue Isles. Ghost Widow wields a stream of deadly phantasm energy she calls her Soul Storm. It is rumored to be the essence of tortured spirits belonging to those she has killed, now commanded to strike out and torment her foes. She is the leader of the Widows and arguably the most wicked of Recluse's followers.

World of Warcraft takes over the world

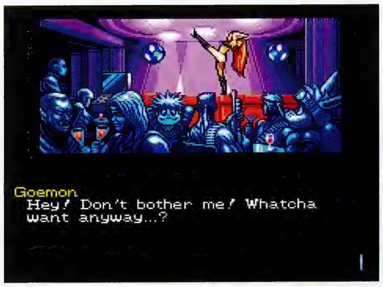
World of Warcraft has surpassed 3.5 million global customers, making it the largest MMO on the planet. The game was on a roll after the North American, European, Australian and Korean launches, but the success it has achieved following its launch in China was unprecedented: within the first month, WoW had reached 1.5 million paying customers in that territory. Next stop? Singapore and Taiwan. With this summer's version 1.6 patch update, World of Warcraft now includes more content to keep fans busy: two dedicated objective and team-based PvP maps and the challenging top-level Blackwing Lair raid dungeon.

Snatcher

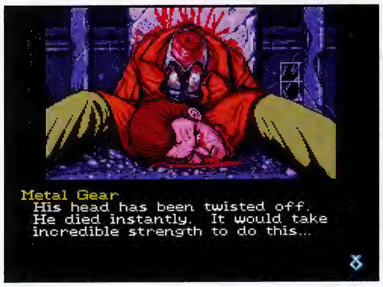
This is dedicated to all those cyberpunks out there…

System: Sega CD **Developer:** Konami **Publisher:** Konami **Released:** 1994

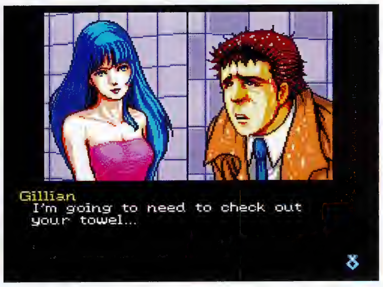
Snatcher was filled with in-jokes, such as the nightclub "Outer Heaven," where patrons dressed as characters from other Konami games.



Goemon
Hey! Don't bother me! Whatcha want anyway...?



Metal Gear
His head has been twisted off. He died instantly. It would take incredible strength to do this...



Gillian
I'm going to need to check out your towel...

There are games that are just games, and then there are games that change everything. For me, Snatcher is one of the latter. Although the gameplay was very simple—it was essentially a digital manga with occasional first-person shooting segments thrown in—Snatcher took me places that no game previously could. Snatcher proved that a game could be mature in the truest sense of the word without resorting to extremes in sex, language or violence, although it certainly pushed the envelope. It's also the game that showed me how involving a story could really be, as Hideo Kojima created a completely absorbing futuristic world with loads of history and backstory. At its time of release, the story—that of the JUNKER organization fighting the bio-roid Snatcher menace—and translation were the best in gaming, bar none, and that was only further reinforced by amazing voice acting that still stands as some of the best even today. Despite its serious tone, Snatcher also took time to poke fun at itself with inside jokes and references to other Konami games, such as the diminutive navigator robot called Metal Gear Mk II. Although many fans have requested a Snatcher revival on modern systems, Kojima is content to let it remain exclusive to Sega CD in the U.S., so if you have a chance, be sure to snatch up this classic. Chris Hoffman

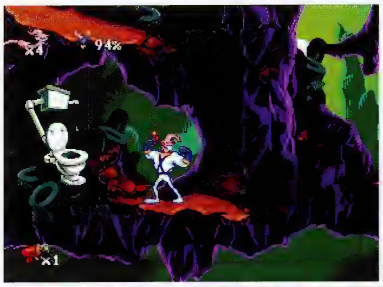
> **"…mature in the truest sense of the word…"**

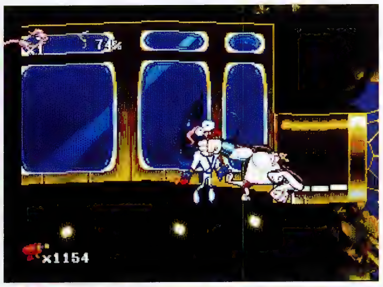
Earthworm Jim

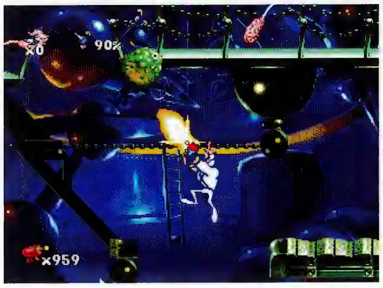
Groovy!

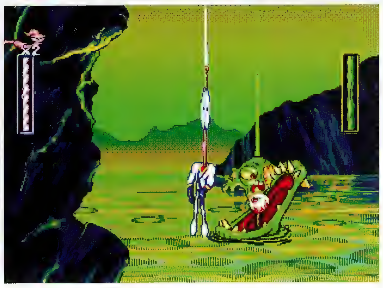
System: Genesis, SNES **Developer:** Shiny Entertainment **Publisher:** Playmates **Released:** 1994

Jim poses next to the hidden warp toilet in New Junk City.





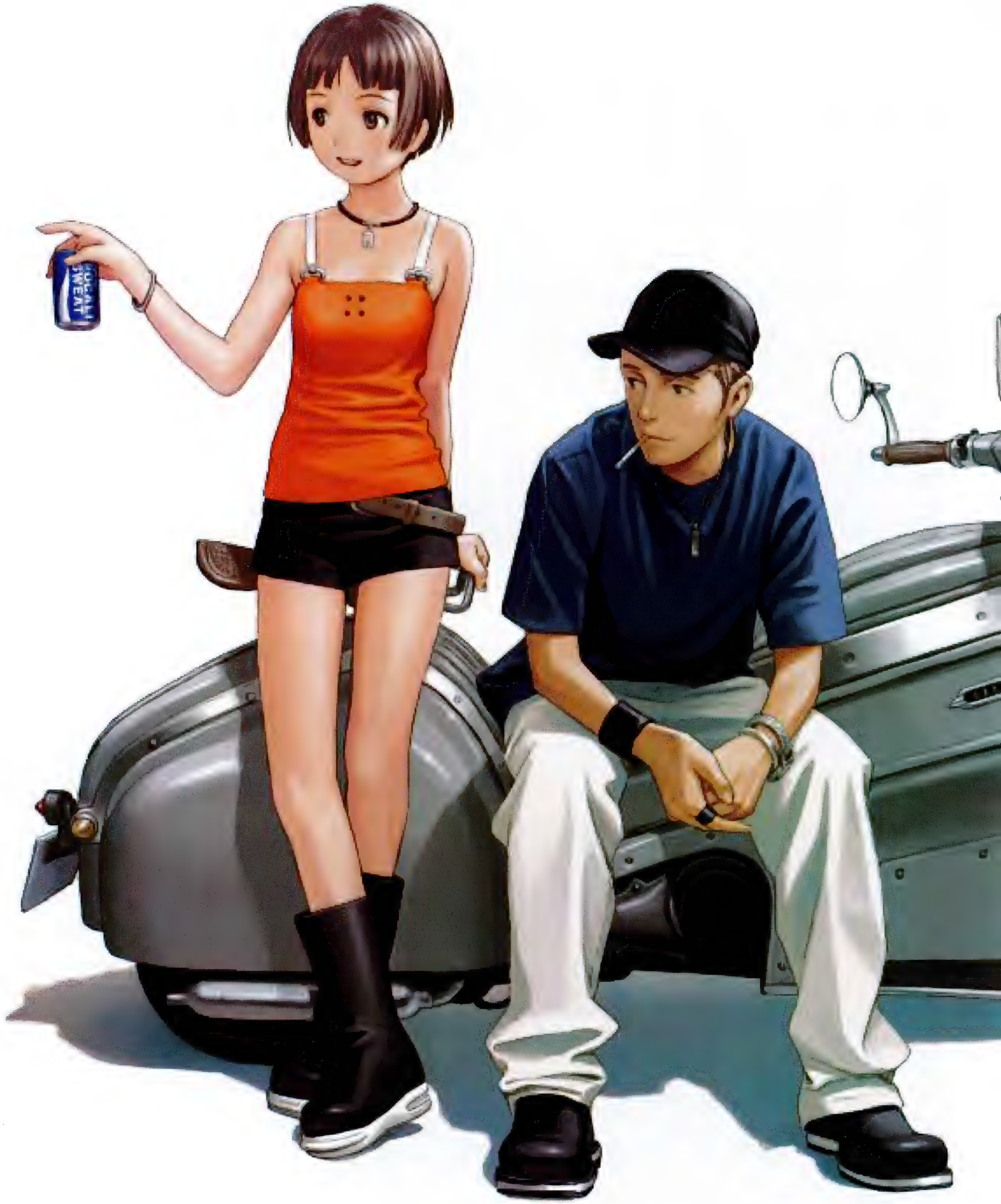




Who can ever forget the unscrupulous Evil the Cat dancing jovially in the background of hell to vacillating bits of elevator music as we whipped lawyer, demon and fire-breathing snowman; riding hamsters and piloting the glass submersible in "Down the Tubes;" Peter Puppy taking his pound of flesh for every unguarded alien attack in "For Pete's Sake;" the amazing "Level 5;" or that mightiest of all bosses, Queen Pulsating, Bloated, Festering, Pus-filled Slug-for-a-butt? Those are but a few of the many magic moments from the mightiest of all Genesis games, Earthworm Jim. The pinnacle of 2D animation for 16-bit, it remains to this day one of my very favorite 16-bit games ever. Might I also suggest tracking down the entire cartoon series on VHS, as it's one of the cheekiest animated shows ever allowed on kids TV. If you got into gaming post Jim's reign, EWJ, EWJ2 (and EWJ 3D if you get completely hooked) are mandatory experiences. Of all the series that I'd like to see return, Jim is at the very top of the list, and with Interplay kaput, one would think the light at the end of the tunnel is at least flickering. In the meantime, don't miss your only opportunity to bungee-brawl over a pool of snot. Dave Halverson

> **"…it remains to this day one of my very favorite 16-bit games ever."**

play anime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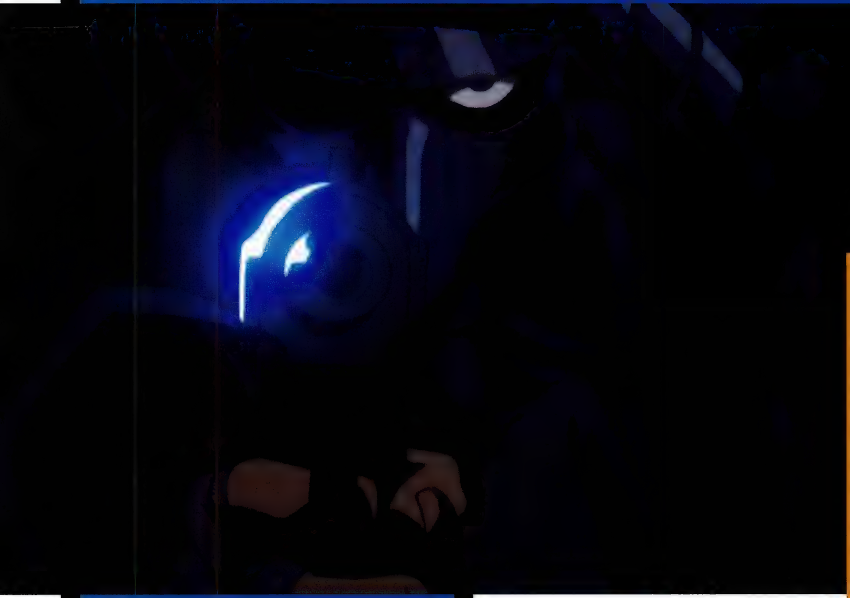
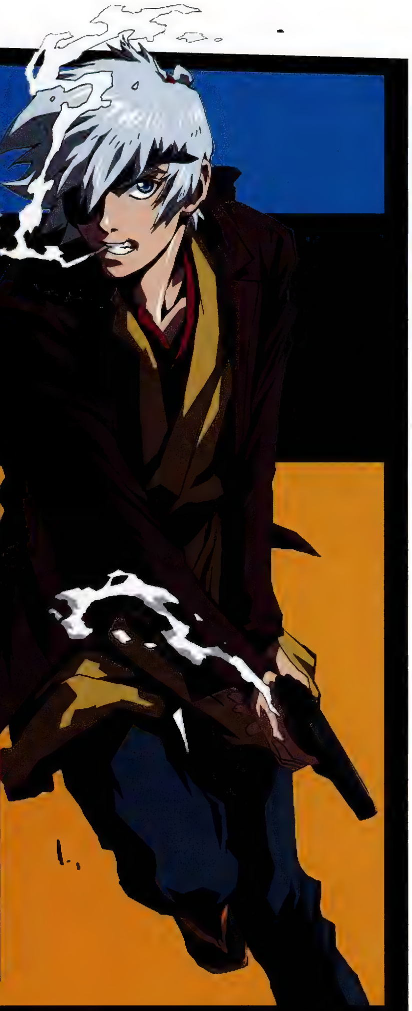
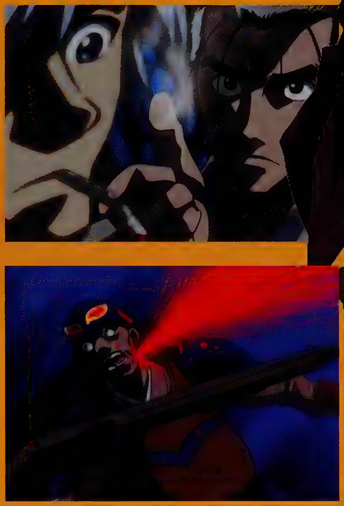
SAMURAI GUN

Justice, six bullets at a time...





Daimon and Ichi having one of their many tense moments.



It would be easy to pass off *Samurai Gun* as a *Samurai Champloo* or *Kenshin* wannabe, but there's a lot more going on here than just your token samurai drama clone. Where *Champloo*'s emphasis is on style and deadpan humor—areas in which it often misfires—*Gun* cuts straight to the business of people who do very bad things (beautiful young women get skewered through the heart at the outset) and those sent to kill them—namely the Samurai Guns, anchored by the reluctant anti-hero Ichimatsu. Forced to watch his sister's brutal murder, Ichi's redirected his anger towards feudal Japan's wretched underbelly circa the industrial revolution, cutting through the local shogun's assassination squads like so much margarine as part of an insurgence headquartered from a local tavern where there's more to the local drunk (wolf in sheep's clothing, Daimon) and entertainment (the beautiful Kurenai) than meets the eye. Both are as deadly as they are steadfast in their crusade—a resolve not shared by Ichi, who doesn't take well to killing, even though he does so with otherworldly precision. Ichi's only motivation comes from the prostitute he loves, but never lays a finger on—a union that makes for some truly compelling dramatic sequences.

Gun is also ultra-crude—four letter words abound—on top of ultra-violent. If you like the red stuff, and not so much the fluff, you'll feel at home from the first bullet. Speaking of which, with the weapon of choice being guns over swords, the first few episodes pump more lead than Scarface at an ammo dump, in between crossbow arrows and the odd dagger. Seems like everywhere you turn, someone is getting punctured or pumped full of lead.

Samurai Gun may not be as polished as *Champloo* or as renowned as *Kenshin*, but what it lacks in detail and notoriety (it's still a very nicely made show) it more than makes up for in its tenacious nature. If these first few episodes are any indication, we're in for a bloody good time. Dave Halverson

> "...the first few episodes pump more lead than Scarface at an ammo dump..."

サムライクルー
Samurai Crew
[zi:,zi(:)]

Samurai Gun 9.0 Score

Volume: 1

Character and plot development get off to a smoking start and the Gun get-ups are awesome.

✗ Heavy-handed localization. Lots of Western-tinged cursing: samurai talking like truck drivers.

Released by: ADV Films **Rating:** TV MA
Running Time: 100 minutes **Available:** August 16

His First Battle was TRAGIC
His Second Coming was FULL OF RAGE

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GHOST TALKER'S Daydream

My favorite medium

A career dominatrix who sees dead people and sports a spiritual umbilical cord may sound like a stretch…until you meet Misaki Saiki, who couldn't be any more blasé about either of her peculiar professions. She treats the dominatrix gig like a secretary job (even though she provides "hardplay sessions" for the more experienced customers) and is reluctant, to say the least, about her extraordinary gift as a spirit medium, quick to point out that she's not a guide but merely a temporary residence for the undead to air their residual dirty laundry here on Earth (which so happens to involve some of the darkest themes you'll find in series anime). The producers exercise little to no restraint when it comes to dearly departed children, four letter words, wholesale nudity and other such taboos, all of which are dealt with as they pertain to the story, sans so much as a drop of fan service. Although it can be (and is often) funny—comic relief comes by way of the bumbling Souichiro Kadotake, a nerd-come-badass working for a special branch of the government assigned to paranormal investigations—*Daydream* spends most of its time in the first-person, and life through Misaki's jaded eyes is truly bizarre. Imagine MTV's Daria if she was smoking hot, a medium, cursed like a sailor, worked as a dominatrix and was drawn well. Where pensive and/or disgruntled protagonists usually lead to pacing woes, frustration or both, in this case—due to a great performance by Karen Thompson and its pull-no-punches themes—the opposite applies with an assist from two running gags that contract the heavy stuff: Misaki's curiously out-in-the-open stalker-come-photographer, and her struggles with being naturally 100 percent hairless you-know-where, a trait (or curse depending on how you look at it) which she embraces with all the finesse of a balding rock star.

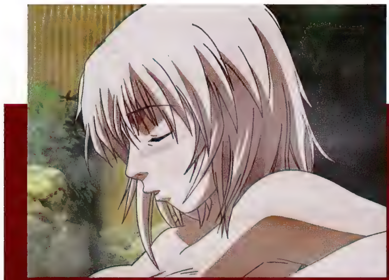
Dave Halverson

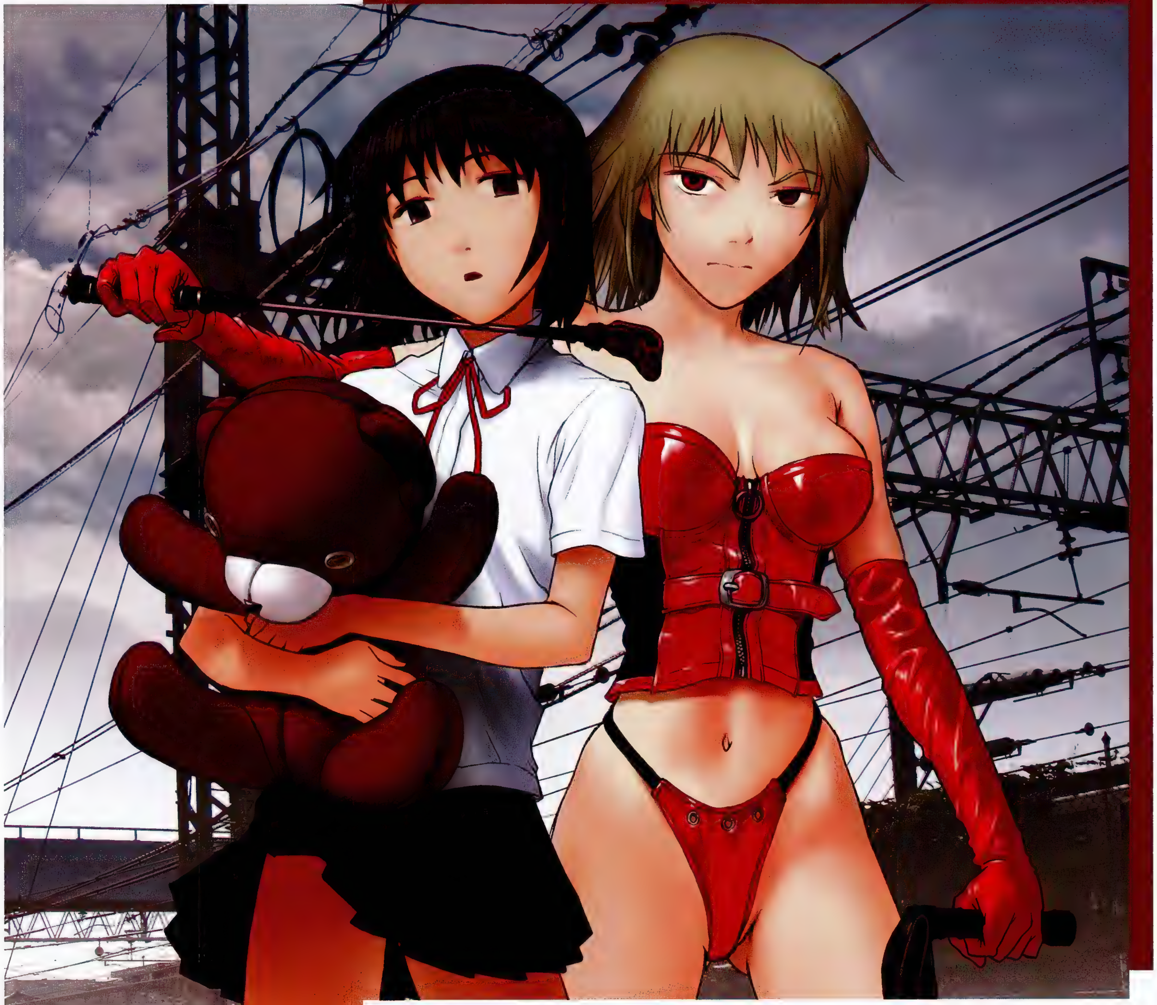
Ghost Talker's Daydream 8.5
Volume: 1
Score

○ Although the devices are nothing new, the tone and delivery come across as completely unique.

☒ Things can get pretty dark and Misaki's apprentice, Ai, is a bit of a drag for the time being.

Released by: Geneon Entertainment **Rating:** 16 and up
Running Time: 100 minutes **Available:** August 23





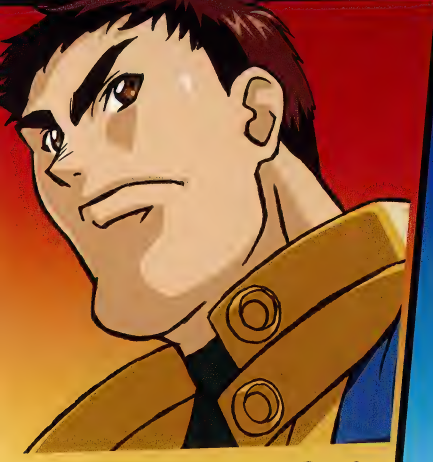
"…life through Misaki's jaded eyes is truly bizarre."

Doh! Guess who's not wearing any underwear...

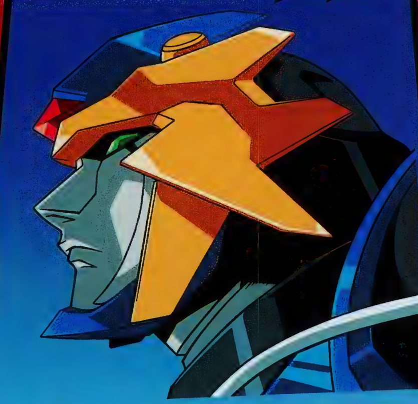
A GUIDE TO GODANNAR

MARRIAGE OF GOD & SOUL
GODANNAR

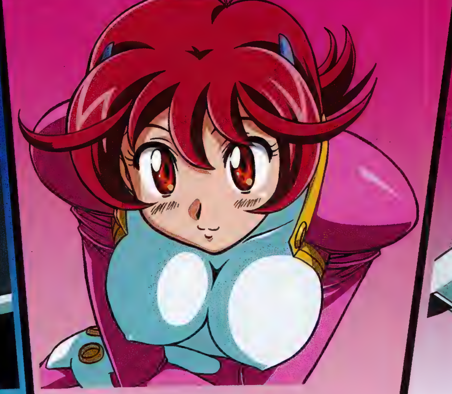
BECAUSE SO MUCH HAPPENS IN THE FIRST VOLUME OF THE EXCITING NEW SERIES *GODANNAR*, WE'VE PREPARED THIS QUICK GUIDE TO HELP YOU KEEP TRACK OF WHAT'S GOING ON, JUST IN CASE YOU BLINK.



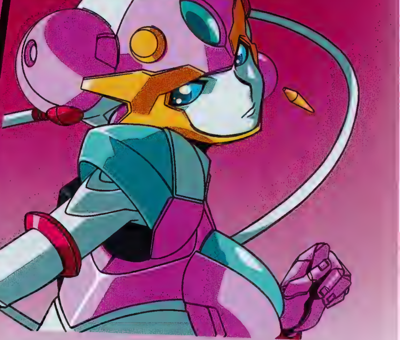
THIS IS GOH.



THIS IS GOH'S GIANT ROBOT.



THIS IS ANNA.



THIS IS ANNA'S GIANT ROBOT.

FIVE YEARS AGO, GOH AND HIS GIANT ROBOT SAVED ANNA'S LIFE WHEN....

...THE MIMETIC BEASTS FIRST ATTACKED THE EARTH. NOW THEY KEEP COMING BACK. THEY'RE ANNOYING.

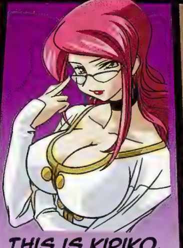
MEANWHILE, GOH AND ANNA GOT MARRIED.

AND THEIR ROBOTS CAN MATE TOGETHER TO MAKE AN EVEN BIGGER ROBOT. (IS IT JUST US, OR IS THAT KINDA FREUDIAN?)

UNFORTUNATELY, GOH DOESN'T THINK HIS WIFE SHOULD BE HIS COMBAT PARTNER. THIS CAUSES PROBLEMS.

THIS IS SHIZIRU, ANOTHER GIANT ROBOT PILOT WHO'S ALSO IN LOVE WITH GOH. THIS IS ALSO A PROBLEM.

THIS IS MIRA, GOH'S OLD COMBAT PARTNER AND GIRLFRIEND. EVERYONE THOUGHT SHE WAS DEAD BUT IT TURNS OUT THAT SHE'S NOT. THIS IS A REALLY BIG PROBLEM.



THIS IS KIRIKO. SHE'S ANNA'S MOM AND ALSO GOH'S BOSS. GUESS WHOSE SIDE SHE'S ON?

THIS IS THE PRINCIPAL OF ANNA'S SCHOOL. HE SAYS IT'S OKAY FOR ANNA TO BE MARRIED AND BECOME A GIANT ROBOT PILOT AS LONG AS SHE KEEPS IT A SECRET FROM HER CLASSMATES... WHAT THE HELL IS HE SMOKING?

ANNA'S CLASSMATES. YOU CAN GUESS WHY THEY'RE IN THIS SERIES.

THIS IS SHINOBU. HE'S GOH'S YOUNGER BROTHER AND GOES TO SCHOOL WITH ANNA. HE ALSO LIVES WITH GOH AND ANNA IN A VERY SMALL APARTMENT...

...WHICH CAUSES EVEN MORE "PROBLEMS" IF YOU KNOW WHAT WE MEAN AND WE THINK YOU DO.

THIS IS LOU, A YOUNG ORPHAN GIRL THAT GOH AND ANNA HAVE TAKEN IN. LOU'S ALSO LEARNING TO BE A GIANT ROBOT PILOT SINCE HER FATHER WAS KILLED BY THE MIMETIC BEASTS.

OKAY, THAT WAS THE EASY PART. NOW, TO COMPLICATE THINGS...

LET'S ADD A PAIR OF NOT-QUITE TWIN BRIDGE BUNNIES, THEIR DASHING COMMANDER, A PREGNANT CAT, A HALF DOZEN SEXUALLY FRUSTRATED MECHANICS, A GAGGLE OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS,

THE CREW OF A SPACE STATION, NINE MORE GIANT ROBOT PILOTS IN A WIDE ASSORTMENT OF VARYING GENDERS, NATIONALITIES AND SEXUAL PREFERENCES,

A GENEROUS SPRINKLING OF FAN SERVICE AND, OF COURSE, A WHOLE SLEW OF ADDITIONAL GIANT ROBOTS AND MIMETIC BEASTS...

...AND WE JUST RAN OUT OF PAPER. IF YOU WANT TO KNOW MORE ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS IN THE FIRST EXCITING VOLUME OF GODANNAR...

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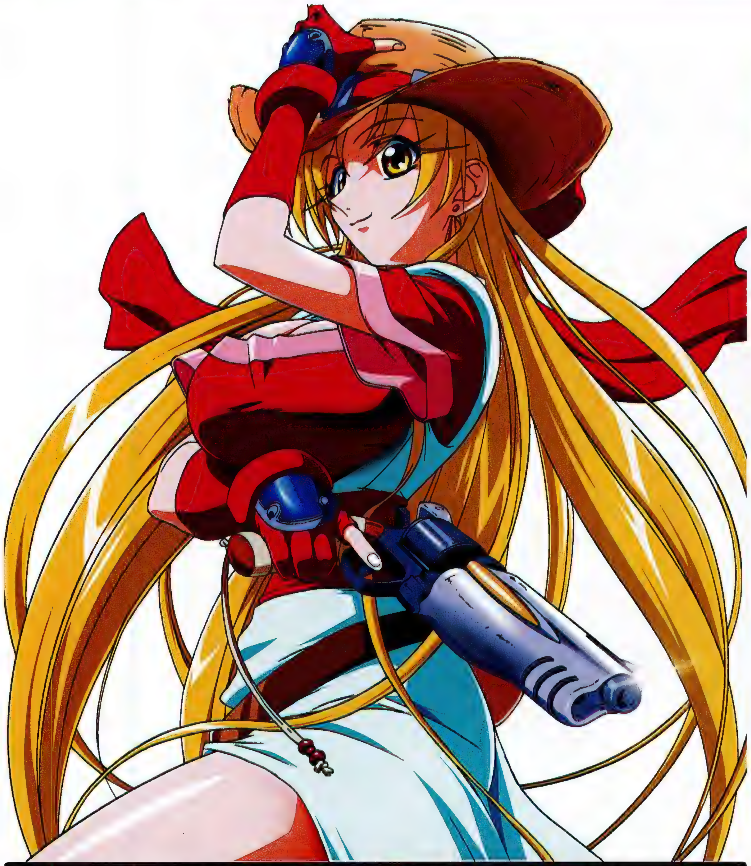


Grenadier: The Beautiful Warrior

Volume: 1 - "Service with a Smile"

○ This is as fun a series as you'll see this year. Part Trigun, part Slayers, wonderfully produced.

☒ I wouldn't call it a negative, but some might shudder at the emphasis placed on Rushuna's rack.

8.5 Score

Released by: Anime Works **Rating:** 13 and older **Running Time:** 100 minutes **Available:** July

I certainly love a good Western, especially when it involves a lone female gunslinger trying to single-handedly end the Great Japanese Civil War…using only her smile. Rushuna Tendoh's battle strategy: Eliminate the enemies' will to fight without fighting them, unarmed, by holding them close to her soft bosom…and if that doesn't work, fire at will! As you've likely gathered, Rushuna is in possession a few key assets—one being otherworldly skills with a six-shooter and the other a mammoth pair of boobs. Unlike most overly endowed vixens, however, Rushuna puts hers to good use, using them to bounce bullets off of and into her chamber as she performs her patented spinning reload maneuver! Can I get a "Weeee-haw!"? Joining forces with Rushuna (in a manner of speaking; she actually saves his hide) is Yajiro Torajima, a young, sometimes bold, samurai master for hire who, in a refreshing twist, doesn't shoot blood from his nose at the sight of her, but rather embraces all of her womanly abilities. He may think her a loon, but she certainly gets the job done. Standing toe-to-toe at gauntlet after gauntlet, no matter the odds or size of the villain, posse, whatever, Rushuna always gets her man, er, men. Here's a great looking, super-fun show. Score another for Anime Works… Make that two; they finally updated that ear-gouging old logo! Dave Halverson

"Eliminate the enemies' will to fight…by holding them close to her soft bosom…"

Fafner

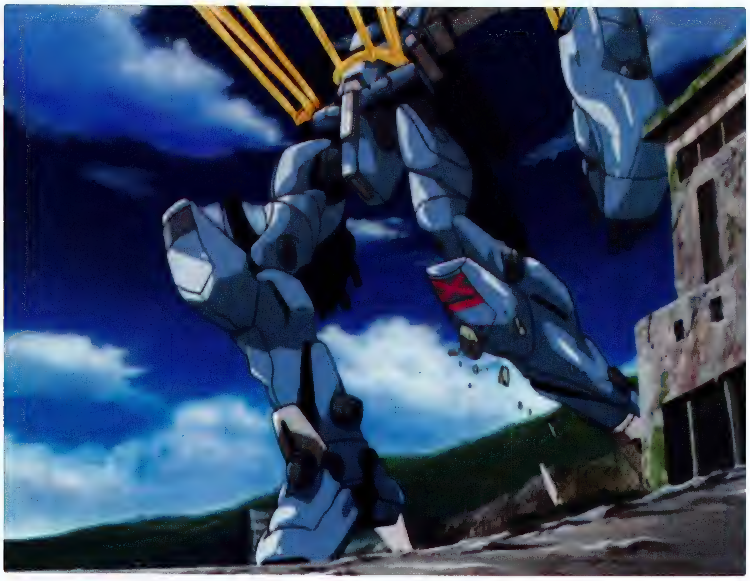
Volume 1 - "Arcadian Project"

○ The idea of the base staffed with both parents and children [illegible]

☒ [illegible] work when it comes to combat.

5.5 Score

Released by: Geneon Entertainment **Rating:** 13 and up **Running Time:** 100 minutes **Available:** July

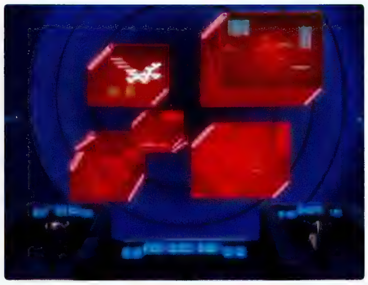


A young boy, blissfully ignorant of his parent's work as part of a secret military organization, is suddenly put into the cockpit of a highly formidable mecha as a demigod-like entity approaches his city to wipe the earth of it—and amazingly, he succeeds. *Neon Genesis Evangelion*? Nope. *Fafner.*

Tatsumiya Island has been hidden from the world for almost three decades, maintaining its deception thanks to holographic camouflage technology, all the while vigilant of being discovered, or worse, attacked by said demigods. After the stoic commander and air force of the island are systematically wiped out after the first attack, it's up to guarded high schooler Kazuki and emotionless best friend Soshi to continually pilot the experimental weapon known as Fafner in defense of future attacks.

It's uncanny at times how this title falls back to tried-and-true methods of human-piloted mecha series, with typical characters, plot devices and enigmatic enemies. What makes it more difficult is the similar likenesses of said characters—that can't be recognized from one another without scrutinizing over it—and the weakly paced battles. And yet, the idea of a moving island base is fascinating, if not impossible for its sheer girth. The series offers plenty of unanswered questions to be discovered, but only the hardiest fans of the genre will want to start on the path to them at this early stage. Jim Dewey

"…this title falls back to tried-and-true methods of human-piloted mecha series…"



Giant robots are attacking! Quick! Someone begin tapping on keyboards!

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Genshiken: Society for the Study of Modern Visual Culture

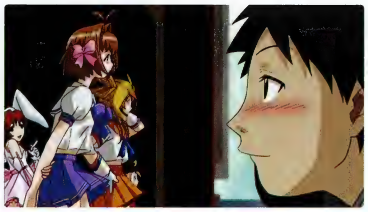
Volume 1

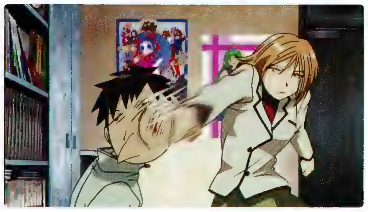
○ [illegible]

☒ [illegible]

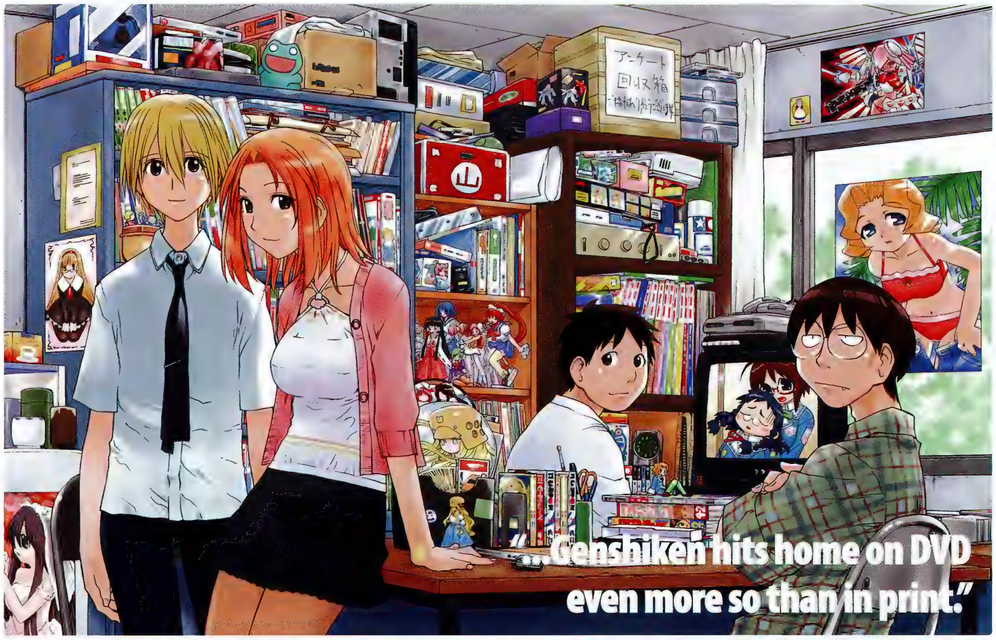
9.0 Score

Released by: Anime Works **Rating:** 13 and older **Running Time:** 100 minutes **Available:** July





For once I actually read the manga *before* seeing the anime, and as good of a read the manga was, the anime is even better: *Genshiken* hits home on DVD even more so than in print. As any game/anime freak will attest, we're a sick bunch of puppies when you get right down to it. As I write this, I am literally surrounded by a sea of shapely 6-to-12-inch-tall anime and game girls, all of which I covet in a most unhealthy way…and if I see a new series (oooh, *Tenjho Tenge*!), I gotta have it. Luckily for me, I've found a woman willing to accept me for the sausage that I am (better games and anime than the alternative, eh, plus I eat right and even play outdoors), unlike Makoto, an unlikely Otaku whose aspiring girlfriend loathes nothing more than his unnatural fascination with all things anime and manga. Just when it looks like he might be turning the corner, college freshman and protagonist Kanji Sasahara finally decides to take the plunge and join The Society for the Study of Modern Visual Culture—aka a video game/anime/manga club so pathetic it makes a herd of NFL couch potatoes look like mortal enemies—where he and Makoto become guy pals. She, to say the very, very least, is not amused (and has one helluva right cross). A great-looking show with another fine localization in tow by Anime Works, the stage is set for an overtly fun and possibly educational ride. Dave Halverson



"…Genshiken hits home on DVD even more so than in print."

Makoto's better half goes off on Kanji.

Gankutsuou: The Count of Monte Cristo

Volume: 1

○ What can you say about a man who can get whatever he wants? The whole show exudes class and top-notch drama.

☒ CG elements could use some tweaking…and please, please, reverse the end sequence with the opening one.

9.5 Score

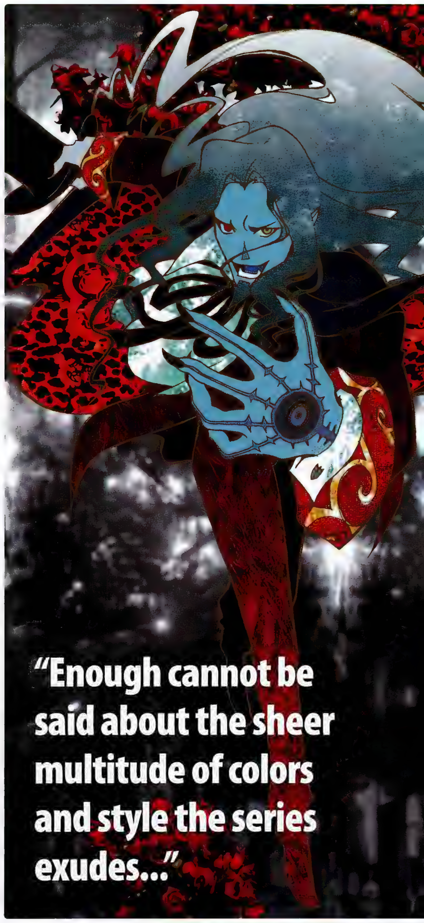
Released by: Geneon Entertainment **Rating:** 16 and up **Running Time:** [illegible] minutes **Available:** October

Below: The suit is color-cycling…trippy stuff. Innovative, but trippy.

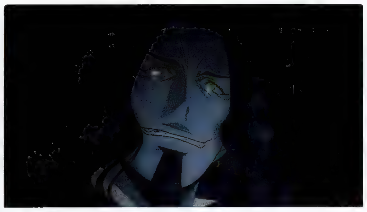
Imagine you have everything going for you: a promising career, a magnificent fiancée, you're well-liked, plus the money and reputation to make a name for yourself. But then your cohorts betray you, you're thrown into a desolate prison, left to rot, your reputation ruined, family name sullied, and all you have is a festering hatred for those that put you there—and you'll stop at nothing to exact the ultimate revenge.

Decades later, young Albert de Morcerf, impressionable chap that he is, finds himself kidnapped and ransomed for such an outrageous sum that his childhood best friend, Franz, must impose upon the recent acquaintance of the Count of Monte Cristo to put up the money before sunrise… But the Count goes one step further and rescues the lad from death's door, and in return merely asks for an introduction into Parisian society. But what are the true intentions of this soft-spoken, worldly, wealthy individual? And why does Albert find himself in awe of such an enigmatic gentleman? This is the literary tale of Edmund Dantès, reborn as the self-proclaimed aristocrat Count of Monte Cristo.

The story has been brought forth into the far-flung future. The blue-skinned nobleman is theorized to be an alien or vampire, but maintains a level of sophistication that allows anyone who meets him to be instantly impressed. Enough cannot be said about the sheer multitude of colors and style the series exudes, from the unique characters to the patterns matted against characters' clothes, hair and just about everything else, which may discombobulate the casual viewer at first. The anime takes minor liberties with the original text, even by starting deep into the tale and using the Count's past to serve as windows to his rise, if only to enhance the narrative. Minimal action aside, the true strength is in its characters and its unfolding revelations. The Count is unflappable, confident and believable to the point that the viewer may find themselves charmed by his facade. Director Mahiro Maeda (*Kill Bill, Animatrix)* masterfully adapts the sordid, twisting tale to a new medium *and* era that even literary critics would applaud such skill. Revenge never tasted so sweet. Jim Dewey



"Enough cannot be said about the sheer multitude of colors and style the series exudes…"



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ヘルシング

Hellsing

Ultimate OVA

Hell Has a Fresh New Look

Anime fans, the die-hard ones anyway, when hearing the name "Alucard," don't think of a frilly-dressed, cape-wearing, feyish half-vamp; they think red hat, round spectacles and a maniacal, gun-toting, plasma-sucking vampire.

Play got the first look ever in North America of the trailer for the newly reborn *Hellsing* OVA, some four minutes long in length. Needless to say, everything fans knew from the old series is reworked and revitalized. Vampire and gunplay fanatics will be stunned when they too see the trailer, a hypnotic blend of CG and hand-drawn animation. Bullets rendered in 3D whiz by characters' heads, hundreds of skewered forms are silhouetted against a blood-red sky, the gleam of Alucard's trusty automatics draw attention from his wild-eyed stare.

This time, the original manga is the voice of the story, much to the liking of purist fans, and may actually draw in those castle-scouring game ones as well. I got to sit with Hellsing manga creator Kouta Hirano and original and OVA *Hellsing* producer Yasuyuki Ueda to delve deeper into this rebirth of the gun-slinging fanged one. Jim Dewey

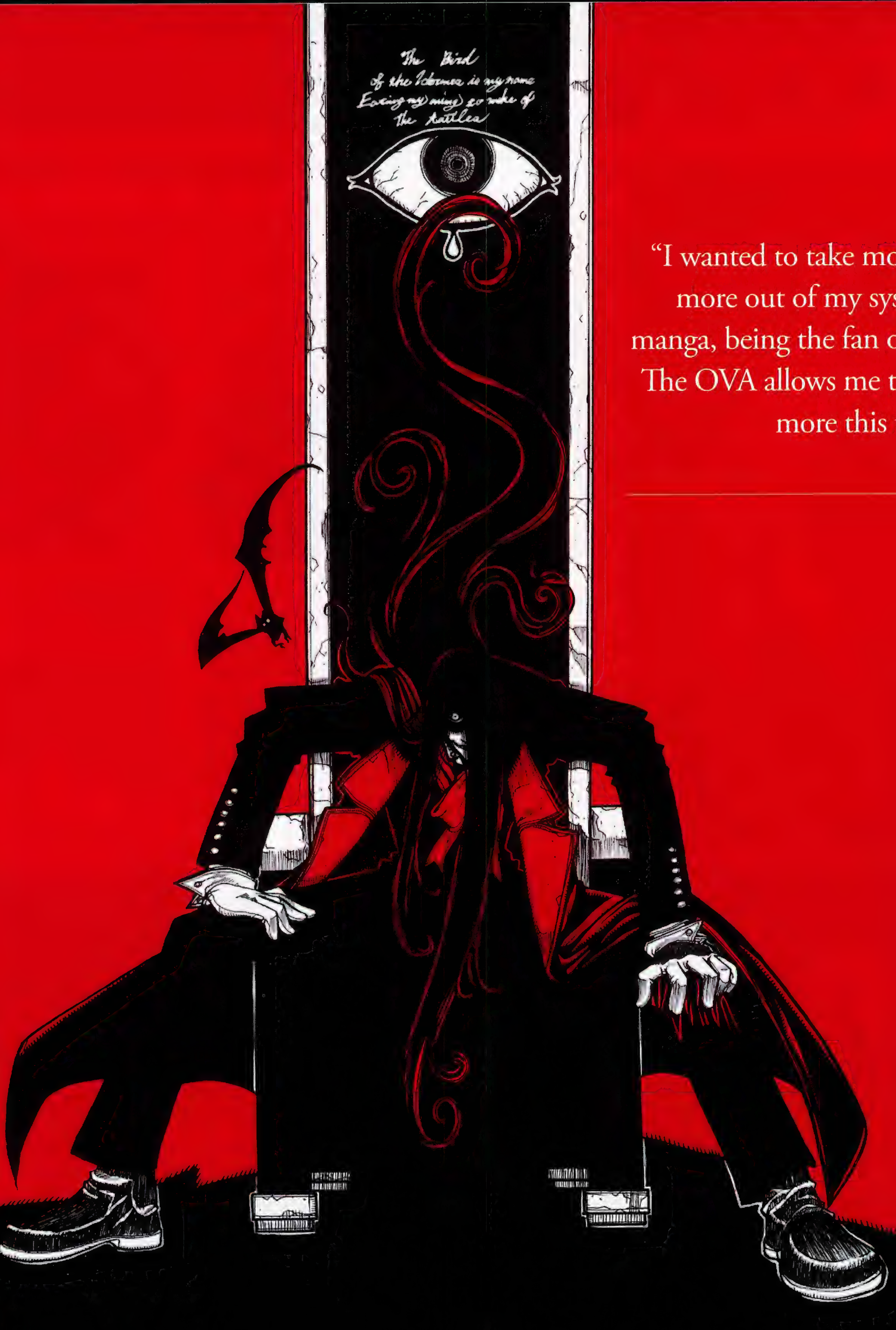
INTERVIEW

KOUTA HIRANO *creator*
YASUYUKI UEDA *producer*

play: When you set out with creating Hellsing, how did you approach the vampire genre, and what made you want to separate Alucard from the typical dignified, cloaked vampire type?
Kouta Hirano: When I set out creating Alucard, I wanted to do a story with gunplay, so making a vampire with guns just didn't work with this formulaic vampire. I added the hat, the long coat… It's still dark and ominous, but just more suited to his behavior. I always come up with the characters before the story.

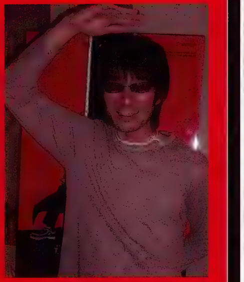
The concept for Seras Victoria was quite an original idea as well, with a cop getting bit and becoming a sidekick. How did that come about?
Hirano: Well, coming from a dark, desolate story, I wanted to create someone who made the series a bit warmer, and a female character involved as well… Seras offered me that opportunity for both of those at the same time. She's the only one that stands out from the darkness.

Why did you want to revisit the title in an OVA?
Yasuyuki Ueda: With the series, there is the usual limitation of time that you can work on each episode, and I wanted to take more time to get more out of my system from the manga, being the fan of it that I am. The OVA allows me to do so much more this time around. Two years ago, I sat down at a convention with writer Yousuke Kuroda, our scenario writer, about it, and he agreed to write the script… That's how it all began and turned it in to what it is today.


The Bird
of the Hermes is my name
Eating my wings to make [illegible]
the [illegible]

> "I wanted to take more time to get more out of my system from the manga, being the fan of it that I am. The OVA allows me to do so much more this time around."

YASUYUKI UEDA *Producer*



What's the count of the episodes you'd intend it to go?
Ueda: Right now, it stands at 30-35 minutes for the first episode from the very beginning of the manga…but if it does well, it will go as long as it sells and wherever the manga takes us. So please, when it gets released here, please buy it! [laughs]

I also noticed, having watched the trailer three times now beforehand, there's a blend of CG elements throughout… Is that going to play heavier into the new OVA?
Ueda: Series today in Japan use quite a lot of CG, which can still be very time-consuming, especially when incorporating it with traditional animation, but now that this project is an OVA, we have that luxury. I would like to use it effectively as much as possible—weaponry, bullets—to make it look realistic.

How long did the manga series take to create overall?
Hirano: The original story didn't take long. I was drawing…[laughing] hentai at the time, and that actually afforded me the opportunity to have it published, of all things.

Beyond the realm of the supernatural and fantastic, what would you like to move on to after *Hellsing* wraps up?
Hirano: I've been working with a theme of death, murder and so on for so long now with Hellsing that I'd want to try something infinitely lighter—I have a few ideas. [smiles]

Thanks to Gloria Pashby for aiding in translating.

> "…making a vampire with guns just didn't work with this formulaic vampire. I added the hat, the long coat… It's still dark and ominous, but just more suited to his behavior."

KOUTA HIRANO *Creator*

anime essentials

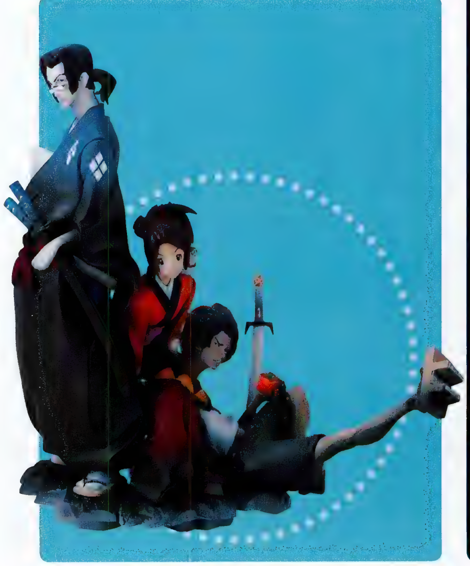
must-have anime, manga & music

ogle this

Seras Victoria, Sonsaku Hakufu, Samurai Champloo...and more

Mini Figures and PVC Statues **Released by:** Yamato Toys

Yamato Toys (yamatotoysusa.com) is taking preorders now for their next parcel of anime collectibles, including Ikki Tousen and Samurai Champloo. Pre-books ended on this amazing new Seras Victoria in late July, so start the search.



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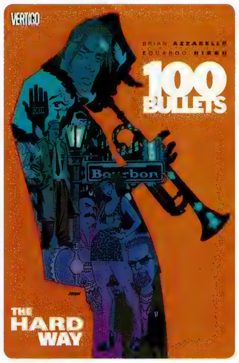
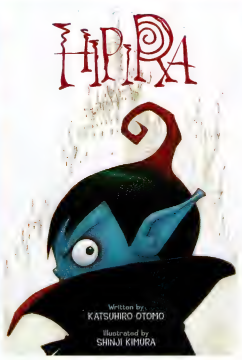

VERTIGO
BRIAN AZZARELLO
EDUARDO RISSO
100 BULLETS
THE HARD WAY

100 Bullets: The Hard Ways

Released by: Vertigo
Rating: Mature Readers

Sound familiar? This gritty crime drama with serious game implications was one of the games Acclaim was working on before they went belly up. Between this and The Red Star, they actually had finally sniffed onto the right trail. A moment of silence, please.


HIPIRA
Written by KATSUHIRO OTOMO
Illustrated by SHINJI KIMURA

Hipira

Released by: Dark Horse Press
Rating: All Ages

After meeting on the set of *Steamboy*, Katsuhiro Otomo (*Akira*, *Steamboy*) got together with Shinji Kimura (*My Neighbor Totoro*, *Lupin the Third*) and created a storybook about a little vampire named Hipira, which instantly became the coolest storybook on Earth. The End.

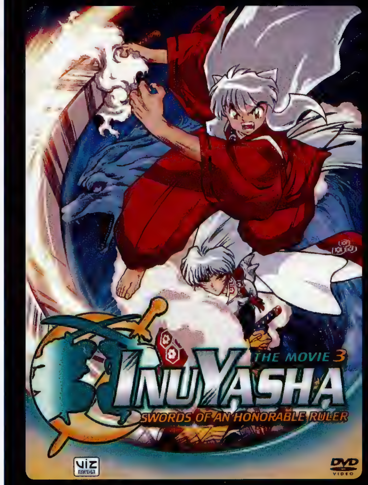
EYESHIELD 21
1
SHONEN JUMP ADVANCED
RIICHIRO INAGAKI
YUSUKE MURATA

Eyeshield 21

Released by: VIZ **Rating:** Older Teen
Now Reading: Vol. 2

Sports manga, you say? Well in this case, heck yes. Eyeshield 21 is the *Happy Gilmore* of the manga set, only with way more high jinks, bizarre characters and bone-crunching action . . . without the alligator kabobs.

watch this


INUYASHA
THE MOVIE 3
SWORDS OF AN HONORABLE RULER
VIZ
DVD

InuYasha The Movie 3

Released by: VIZ Media **Rating:** PG **Now Playing:** Movie

Whether you're down with the demon dog (dog demon, whatever) or not, *The Movie 3* is required viewing. One-hundred minutes of stunning animation that make the TV episodes look like so much dog . . . that word Triumph always says. Seriously, it's great.

The Fuccons

Released by: ADV Films **Rating:** TV PG **Now Playing:** Vol. 1

Welcome to the single most snapped series ever. Leave it to ADV to not only find a series starring a family of mannequins, but unleash it on the world as well. The Fuccons make Cromartie High look like Yale. You've got to see it to believe it.

FUNIMATION
DVD
THE GALAXY RAILWAYS

The Galaxy Railways

Released by: FUNimation **Rating:** TV-PG
Now Playing: Vol. 1

In the legendary Leiji Matsumoto's latest series, Manabu Yuuki takes up the mantle of policing the vast oceans of space (and the trains that run through it) with The Space Defense Force. High-octane interstellar action and intrigue awaits.

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NOW READING

the wonderful world of manga

I Luv Halloween

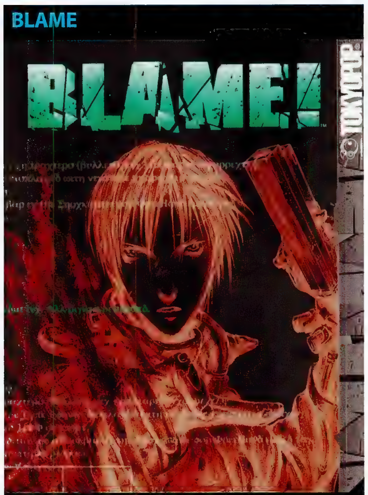
TOKYOPOP
I Luv Halloween

Publisher: TokyoPop **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Comedy/Horror
Rating: 16 and older **Story:** Keith Giffen **Art:** Benjamin Roman

Finch got an apple at the first house, a curse that resulted in a run of Choco-Willies. . . and he doesn't like Choco-Willies. So he puts a razor blade in an apple and gives it to a cop. . . That's one apple-dealin' fat cow that won't be home this Halloween. Meet Finch, Pig Pig, Devil Lad, Mr. Kitty and Spike, out for Halloween. Their dog is back from the dead, Finch's little sister likes to devour fat old ladies (especially the pootie parts), and when Mr. Kitty finally gets a look at Nips' (the town cheerleader) nips, his head explodes. Happy Halloween. **Dave Halverson**

Read it if: You think Hell sounds like a great vacation spot, have a strong stomach, and are just a little disturbed.

BLAME

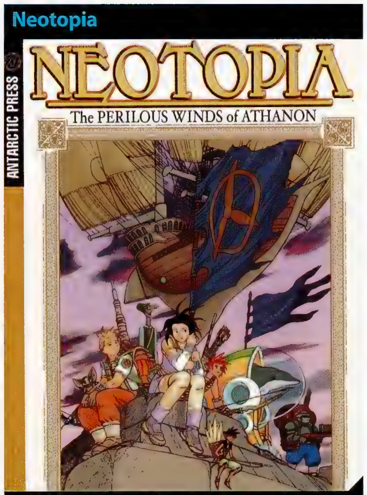


Publisher: TokyoPop **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Sci-Fi/Action
Rating: Older Teen 16+ **Story and Art:** Tsutomu Nihei

I didn't understand the anime and I'm not going to pretend to understand the manga, because I don't think we're supposed to. . . yet. As Killy ascends level after level of decaying steel and concrete cyberdungeons (he has no concept of "land"), searching for Net Terminal Genes and fighting brutal, sadistic, silicate creatures, it's all you can do to keep track of the body count and timeline. BLAME is a manga of few words; action packed, bloody and cerebral to the core, it's stunningly drawn and impossible to put down. **Dave Halverson**

Read it if: Thought-provoking hardcore sci-fi is your thing, or just really appreciate hyper-detailed cybernetic organisms.

Neotopia



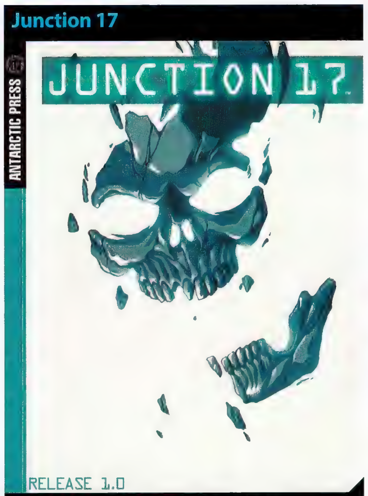
ANTARCTIC PRESS
NEOTOPIA
The PERILOUS WINDS of ATHANON

Publisher: Antarctic Press **Volume:** 1-3 **Genre:** Action/Adventure
Rating: All Ages **Story and Art:** Rod Espinosa

Grand battles and high adventure grace every page of this full-color manga, set in a neo-Victorian utopian future where fantastical creatures live in harmony with humans and nature. Ah, but there is a strong evil force present at well. The crow-like Emperors of Krossia like things the way they were before myth and magic took hold: bleak, dark and industrial. When the ruling party of Methenia doesn't heed their economic policy, the war is on. Incredibly well-told and just tongue-in-cheek enough, it's a great all-ages read. **Dave Halverson**

Read it if: You like all things high adventure, RPGs and the like. Anyone remember the PC Engine /TurboGrafx game?

Junction 17



Publisher : Antarctic Press **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Adventure
Rating: Teen 13+ **Story and Art:** David Hutchison

In this brilliantly told cyber-adventure, devices to access the web are planted directly into your brain, and the god of all "Innermind" online games, Black Wave, is spinning out of control. Be it by ghost or another player, gamers are dying gruesome deaths (right out in the open), and only a handful of users have the power to find out why. This book will spoil you, plain and simple. The full-color art is amazing and Black Wave is the new *Matrix*, only with a much hotter cast. **Dave Halverson**

Read it if: You liked the original *Matrix*. . . hell, just read it. You need this.

Zatch Bell

Pub: VIZ Media **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Action
Rating: Teen **Story and Art:** Makoto Raiku

Kiyo's father, distressed that his only son is squandering his life, has sent him a little gift to motivate him—Zatch Bell—along with a book of spells. Things get off to rocky start (a boy witch in a gym bag isn't a great accessory), but when Kiyo begins getting picked on, as usual, he discovers that reading from the book turns Zatch into a WMD, so everything is hunky dory! Not. Where there's one magical witch boy there's another, and soon enough, all hell breaks loose and Kiyo finds himself spouting incantations as fast as he can read them. **Dave Halverson**

Read it if: You liked Shaman King or just dig evil little children locked in unholy battle, and who doesn't?

Cannon Exaxxion

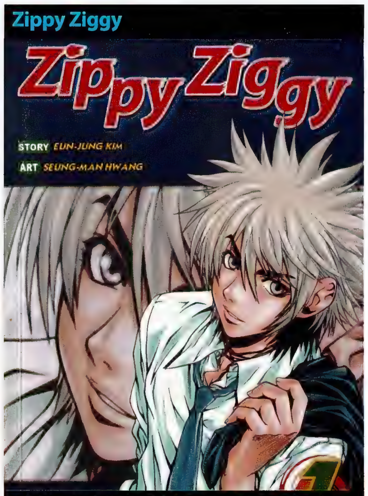
KENICHI SONODA
CANNON GOD
EXAXXION
STAGE 4

Publisher: Dark Horse Manga **Volume:** 1-3 **Genre:** Sci-Fi/Adventure
Rating: Older Teen 16+ **Story and Art:** Kenichi Sonoda

Although it's from the creator of Gunsmith Cats, CE covers entirely new ground, jumping headfirst into an Olympic-sized pool of anime clichés (meaning it's okay). The latest unwary Tokyo teen chosen to don a special suit and save the world from alien invaders is Hoichi Kano, and check this: he even gets a sexy android in the deal. I'd have never seen that coming! But wait, what's this? She can morph into a jet bike? I want one! Didn't see that coming! Next thing you know, he'll be piloting a giant mech. . . er, yeah, so he does. **Dave Halverson**

Read it if: You like A) lots of nekkid boobs, B) lots of mecha action, C) lots of sci-fi high jinks, D) Gunsmith Cats.

Zippy Ziggy



Pub: Infinity Studios **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Action/Romance/Comedy
Rating: 13 and older **Story:** Eun-Jung Kim **Art:** Seung-Man Hwang

Have you ever inadvertently gotten credit for something you didn't do, but didn't say anything about it? Sung-Hae did. And he's starting to regret it now. Plus, the hot new girl that's moved in next door is getting wise to his act. . . and his cross-dressing. . . and his self-centeredness. . . Not to mention she could kick anyone's ass without breaking a sweat. So why does he find himself caring a little about her safety? Maybe he's not thinking about looking out for number one for a change. . .
Jim Dewey

Read it if: There was that one jerk growing up you wanted to see getting his come-uppance.

Popo Can: Super-Trouble Heroine?

Vol. 1
MASAKAZU IWASAKI
Super Trouble
Heroine?
POPO CAN

Publisher: Infinity Studios **Volume:** 1 **Genre:** Comedy
Rating: 13 and older **Story and Art:** Masakazu Iwasaki

I always wished that some of my favorite video game characters would come to life and pop out of my TV. Yasuharu, on the other hand, never did that, and still ended up with the most obnoxious, beer-swilling dimwit of a heroine you'd ever meet: Popomi. Actually, she hasn't done a single heroic deed, come to think of it. Toss in a housemaid mecha, a shy villain and an oblivious grandfather, and you have a real challenger to the throne of *Excel Saga* for nonsensical insanity-per-panel ratios. Fun for all! **Jim Dewey**

Read it if: You're just sick of the emo in those other manga. This'll put the fun back in your reading habits.

BEST SELLING MANGA week ending July 17

01 Fruits Basket Vol. 10 *Tokyopop*
02 FullMetal Alchemist Vol. 2 *Viz Media*
03 Rurouni Kenshin Vol. 16 *Viz Media*
04 FullMetal Alchemist *Viz Media*
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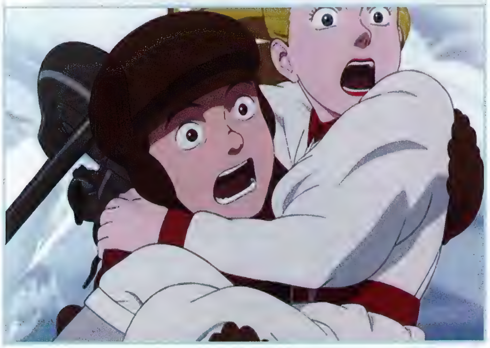
Virgin Megastore Top Ten

01	**Steamboy** *columbia tristar*
02	**Appleseed** *geneon entertainment*
03	**Samurai 7** *funimation productions*
04	**Fafner** *geneon entertainment*
05	**FullMetal Alchemist** *funimation productions*
06	**Paranoia Agent** *geneon entertainment*
07	**Gilgamesh** *adv films*
08	**Burst Angel** *funimation productions*
09	**Ninja Scroll Ultimate Edition** *urban vision*
10	**Samurai Champloo** *geneon entertainment*



Play Magazine Top Ten

01	**Burst Angel** *funimation productions*
02	**Gankutsuou** *geneon entertainment*
03	**Samurai 7** *funimation productions*
04	**Ghost Talker's Daydream** *geneon entertainment*
05	**Burst Angel** *funimation productions*
06	**Grenadier** *anime works*
07	**Gilgamesh** *adv films*
08	**Genshiken** *anime works*
09	**Tenjho Tenge** *geneon entertainment*
10	**Street Fight Alpha Generations** *manga ent.*

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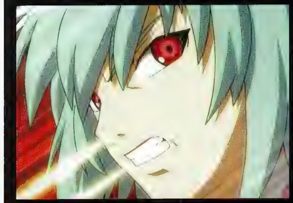
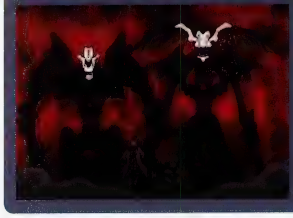


Burst Angel
funimation productions

Volume 2 is out now and doesn't dissapoint. Just wait 'til you see what happens next!



Gilgamesh
adv films

In a year brimming with dark, moody themes, Gilgamesh stands among the very best.

Dave Halverson

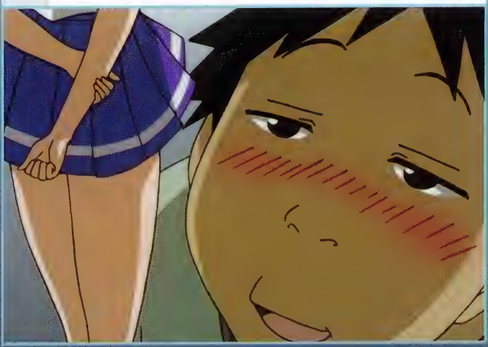
01	**Burst Angel** *funimation productions*
02	**GinRei Special** *anime works*
03	**Grenadier** *anime works*
04	**Ghost Talker's Daydream** *geneon entertainment*
05	**Samurai Gun** *adv films*

Jim Dewey

01	**Gankutsuou** *geneon entertainment*
02	**Cowboy Bebop Remix** *bandai entertainment*
03	**Area 88** *adv films*
04	**Samurai 7** *funimation productions*
05	**FullMetal Alchemist** *funimation productions*

Nelson Lui

01	**Genshiken** *anime works*
02	**Elfen Lied** *adv films*
03	**Grenadier** *anime works*
04	**Ghost Talker's Daydream** *geneon entertainment*
05	**DearS** *geneon entertainment*



Readers' Anime Top Five

01	**Samurai Champloo** *geneon entertainment*
02	**Gunslinger Girl** *funimation productions*
03	**Burst Angel** *funimation productions*
04	**Fullmetal Alchemist** *funimation productions*
05	**Ghost in the Shell SAC** *manga/bandai*

Play Magazine Manga Top Five

01	**I Luv Halloween** *tokyopop manga*
02	**Cannon God Exaxxion** *dark horse*
03	**Junction 17** *antarctic press*
04	**Genshiken** *del rey*
05	**Zippy Ziggy** *antarctic press*

Readers' Most Wanted

01	**Samurai Gun** *adv films*
02	**Cowboy Bebop Remix** *bandai entertainment*
03	**Samurai 7** *funimation productions*
04	**The Count of Monte Cristo** *geneon entertainment*
05	**InuYasha the Movie 3** *viz media*

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Sin City

Starring: Bruce Willis, Elijah Wood, Mickey Rourke
Directed by: Robert Rodriguez, Frank Miller
Released By: Miramax
Rated: R

A man falls asleep reading a comic book orgy of shadowy noir, ravenous violence and the women who rule its world—hopelessly empowered as they are insufferably objectified. The pages leap into his dreams, and these dreams might not look unlike the wildly hypnotic visions of *Sin City*. It is a place of crushing darkness and ubiquitous crime, where no one is safe and the inhabitants are both as real as you and I, and as full of fantasy as a superhero spectacularly fighting crime in the ink of a comic. The movie moves from one distinct act to the next, folding back time and setting as the intertwining narrative threads start to reveal themselves. Packaged as a faithful strip of scenes that seem lifted straight off the pages of the comic, there is nothing profound or especially interesting about its story; *Sin City* is more about drinking in the style of its moments, as emasculated men crawl from the shadows, killing one another for revenge and the lust of a woman. Every character holds some intriguing liking, but the height of the film reaches from perverse mass killer Kevin (Elijah Wood) and disfigured brute Marv who tracks him—played with an intense layer of vulnerability and steel by Mickey Rourke. The brutal world of Frank Miller's comic book has been compellingly digested for the screen, dumping out slick villains and broken characters, pimped out costumes and snappy ruminations on power and aggression. Directed by Miller and Robert Rodriguez—who shows the art of an audacious imagination—the movie is a vivid, often thrilling murder tale, so gruesomely violent that some will label it a misogynistic waste. But consider the impact of the style, the way the dialogue and black and white show us a place of certain detachment, where the occasional flourishes of color speak to the grotesque titillation of the moment. There is a primal note to the violence, a sick fascination that lives in every man's heart but could only dare stay locked at a distance; that distance is deliciously indulged in *Sin City*. Brady Fiechter

Movie: A- Extras: D

The Ring Two

Starring: Naomi Watts, David Dorfman, Simon Baker
Director: Hideo Nakata
Released By: Dreamworks/Universal
Rated: PG-13

It's not that *The Ring Two* is completely devoid of any good spooky pleasures. It's just that the movie feels so much like a calculated throwaway, existing as a mechanical cash register oiled up by the worthy success of the original *Ring*. This limp sequel begins where the first left off, with distraught mommy Rachel Keller (a commendable Naomi Watts) fleeing Seattle after her ghost-busting duties left her son in an emotional quagmire. Her small-town Oregon digs may be new, but the horrors and banalities that follow certainly aren't. Now that the mystery is gone, so's the shock and ability of an atmospherically strong but soulless exercise in horror to leave a mark. Brady Fiechter

Movie: C Extras: C-

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

Starring: Alan Rickman (voice), Sam Rockwell, Martin Freeman, Warwick Davis
Director: Garth Jennings
Released By: Buena Vista Home Video
Rated: PG-13

A whimsical, eccentric science-fiction comedy, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is a pleasantly amusing little film that plays great on video. I came to it in the theater having not read the book on which it is based, really enjoyed its aliens and quirky characters and adventurous spirit, but felt like there was a gap that needed to be filled. Now that I've read the book, I can see what was missing—a richness of theme and subtle irony that made the written adventure more absorbing. But the movie is fresh and fun nonetheless, telling a story about a lone Earthling and his alien friend who are transported off the planet seconds before its annihilation to make way for an intergalactic highway. The pair hitches a ride on one of the ships involved in the destruction, where the captain reads awful poetry before ejecting them into the vacuum of space. Rescued by the president of the Galaxy, they team up with a humorously depressed robot, Marvin, and a cute little assistant to search for the meaning of life. Brady Fiechter

Movie: B Extras: B-

Mindhunters

Starring: Val Kilmer, LL Cool J, Christian Slater
Director: Renny Harlin
Released By: Dimension Home Video
Rated: R

So there's these special FBI guys, see, and they're sharp and hip and mentally unhinged, and they don't necessarily get along, because if they worked as a smooth team in crisis, there wouldn't be any tension for a movie plot. They're also serial killer profilers—and one of them would seem to be the killer they're desperately seeking. Stupid dialogue and a familiar bag of tricks and illogic not withstanding, *Mindhunters* kind of works at times, thanks to the slick direction of action veteran Renny Harlin. For a thriller, the movie's not really that thrilling, but trying to play the who-dunnit game as the body counts gruesomely rise is passable entertainment when you're confused on what to get next on Netflix. Brady Fiechter

Movie: C Extras: C+

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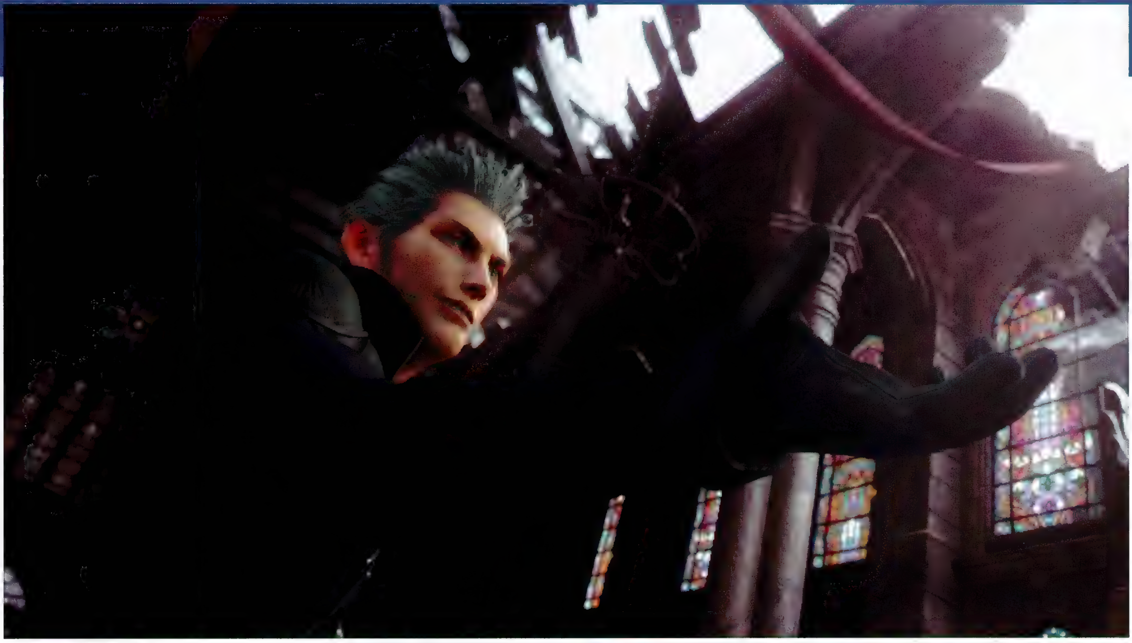
Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children

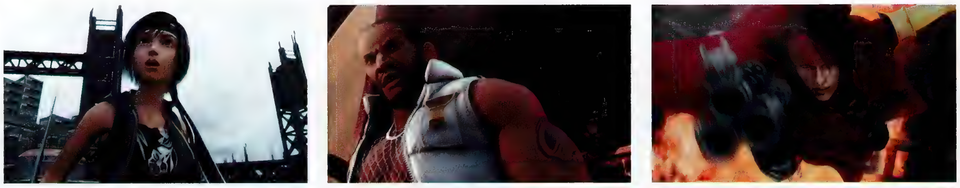
Preview
DVD/UMD
Square Enix



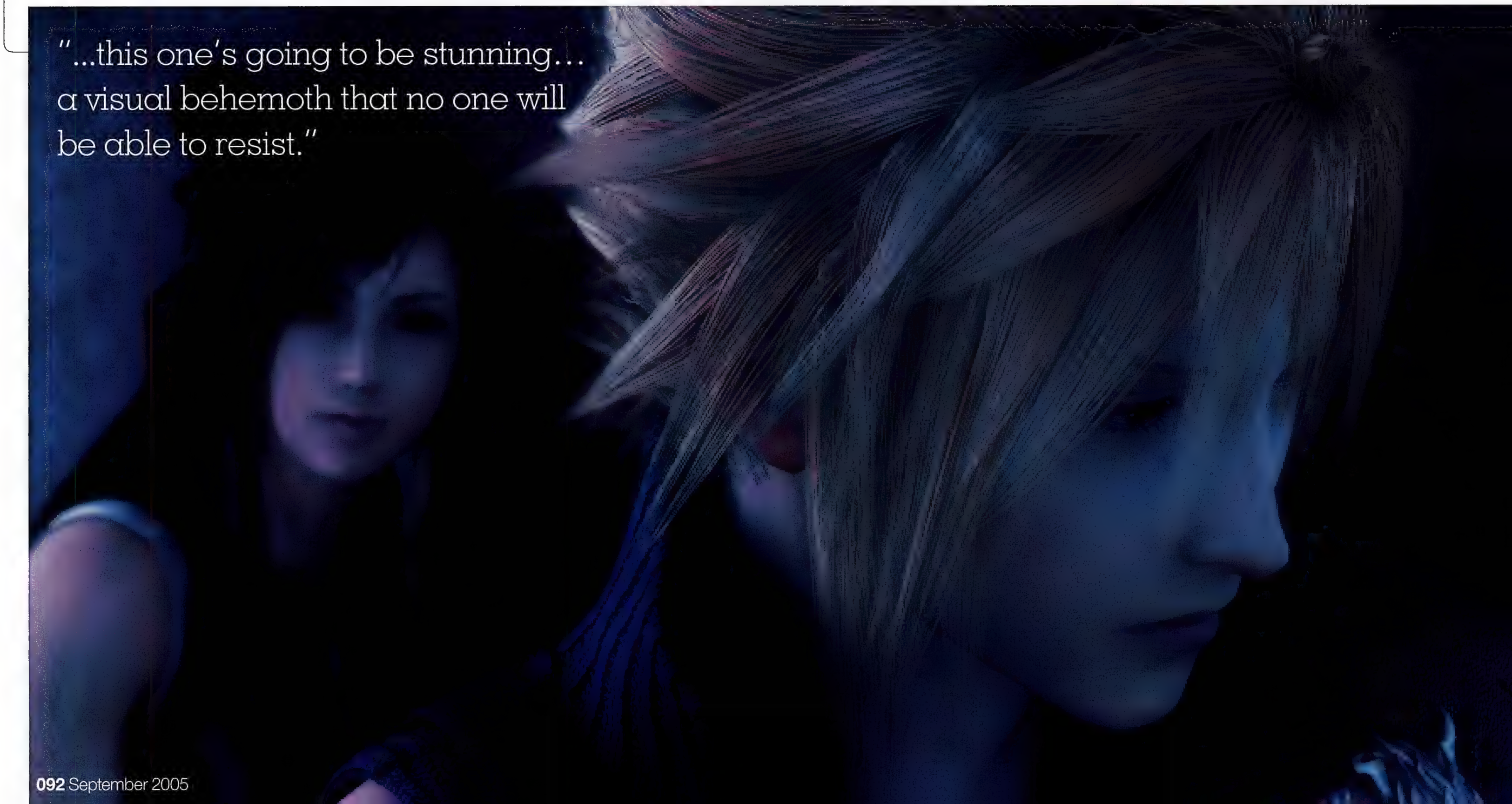
Seeing as how FFVII is one of my favorite RPGs of all time (and a lot of other peoples' favorite as well), the fact that this movie even *exists* is ecstasy-inducing. Reuniting the cast of FFVII, Advent Children is ready to sit you down, strap you in and (from the looks of the trailer) take you on an action-packed, wild ride through Midgar and the rest of the FFVII universe. Cloud's new arch-nemesis, Kadaj, is gearing up to be as wicked as he looks.

Taking place two years after the end of FFVII, Midgar is slowly making its way toward reconstruction…but a mysterious illness named "geostigma" is eating away at the city's progress. Does the nefarious Kadaj have something to do with this infection? Will Cloud once again save the world? If you can't tell by the screenshots, this one's going to be stunning…a visual behemoth that no one will be able to resist. Add in the ominous return of Sephiroth, one of gaming's coolest villains, and Advent Children looks locked, loaded and ready to drop everyone's jaw in one fell swoop. Our only wish is that it would have made its way to the silver screen…because let's be honest: who *doesn't* want to see a 30-foot-tall Sephiroth?

Ashley Esqueda



All the FFVII favorites, like Vincent, Yuffie and Barrett, return for Advent Children.



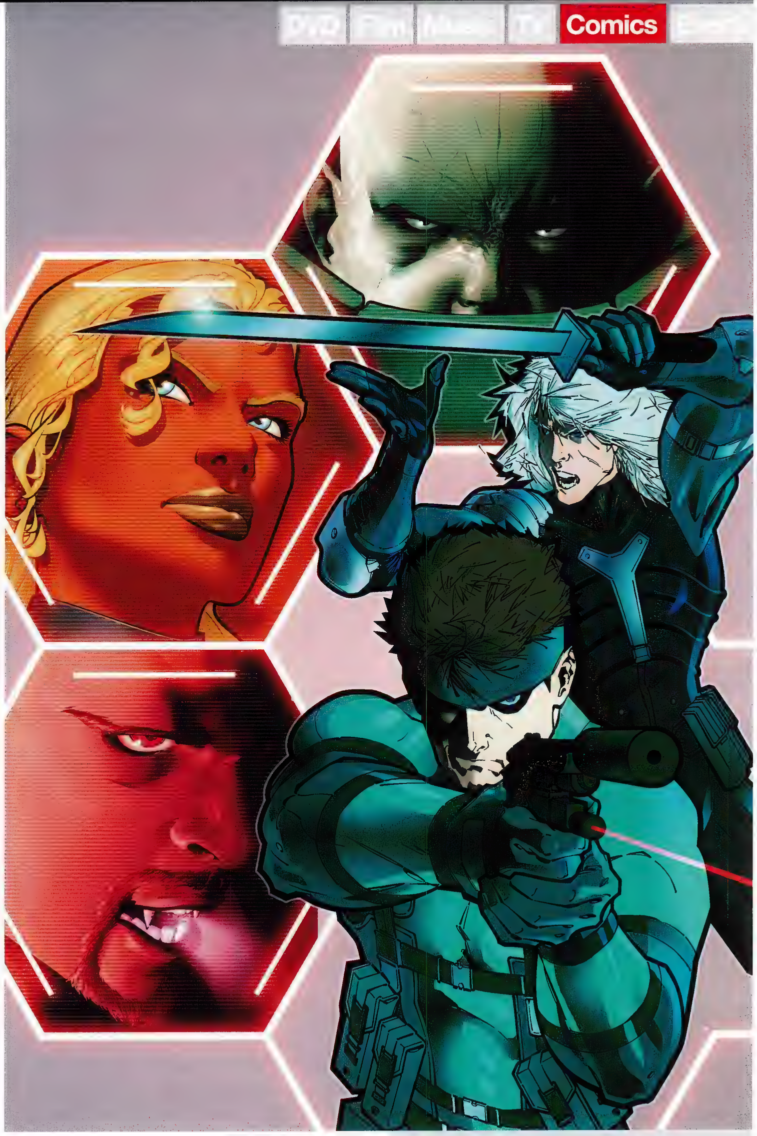
> "…this one's going to be stunning… a visual behemoth that no one will be able to resist."

Give me Liberty

The Metal Gear Solid: Sons of Liberty comic book

KONAMI
OFFICIAL COMIC BOOK
METAL GEAR SOLID
SONS OF LIBERTY

Following their successful comic book adaptation of Metal Gear Solid, IDW Publishing is returning to the world of tactical espionage action with Metal Gear Solid: Sons of Liberty. Written by Alex Garner and drawn by MGS vet Ashley Wood, SOL tells the story of Solid Snake and Raiden confronting the latest Metal Gear menace and the threat of Solidus and Dead Cell, only with new elements and a non-linear presentation that could make the comic in some ways more appealing than the game. The regular 12-issue series is preceded by a special issue #0 in September (featuring a new story and sourcebook info), and for anyone who missed the original Metal Gear Solid series, they can pick up the first trade paperback (collecting issues #1-6) now and a second volume (collecting issues #7-12) in December. Chris Hoffman



Interview

Alex Garner writer **Metal Gear Solid: Sons of Liberty**

play: Thanks for taking the time to speak with me about Metal Gear Solid: Sons of Liberty. So…how do you get ready for writing a comic based on one of the biggest game franchises in the world?
Alex Garner: To be honest, the preparation was pretty intimidating. Sons of Liberty has an extremely complex storyline, so I really had to pore over the game scripts carefully to make sure I fully understood the integral plot points that drive not just the game, but the entire series as well. Let's just say it required a heck of a lot of note taking and reference gathering.

How have your previous works specifically helped prepare you for doing a comic like Sons of Liberty?
My experience in comics over the last decade or so certainly helps, but I think being a huge fan of the Metal Gear series is by far the most important attribute I can take with me. When you really like something, it's very easy to put forth the necessary passion to make it as good as possible.

I'm actually kind of surprised to see an MGS2 comic, given that the story in MGS2 is nothing if not convoluted, and often criticized. What kind of challenges is this presenting to you in translating it to a comic book, and how are you dealing with them?
I would say getting a firm handle on what was really going on in the overall storyline was my biggest concern at first. There are so many multi-layered conspiracies and uncertain alliances going on with the characters in MGS2 that it was a constant struggle to get my head around what was really going on at any given time. So when I crafted my series outline, I worked very hard to condense and streamline the general plot into something that's easier for the reader to follow while still managing to keep the spirit of the original game intact.

Compared to what's been done with the first MGS comic, how will MGS2 differ?
MGS2 will differ mainly in its nonlinear presentation of the story. Events in the comic don't necessarily occur exactly at the same time or in the same manner as they did in the game. Plus, I'm adding a lot of new scenes that should hopefully enhance and give readers a fresh take on the story, even if they've already played the game…

Since so many people dislike Raiden, are you going to do anything to make him more appealing? Or are you instead going to focus more on Solid Snake/ Iroquois Pliskin?
Actually, I'm going to do both. Snake/Pliskin will definitely play a much larger presence in this series, because I know he's who fans of Metal Gear want to see more of. Snake is Metal Gear Solid, pure and simple.

Even so, I also firmly believe Raiden really is a viable character and I'm fleshing him out to hopefully be much more interesting and appealing. He may be a rookie, but he's definitely no wimp. Bullet for bullet, he'll be able to hang with Snake.

What MGS2 characters would you like to explore more in-depth?
I wish I could do a mini-series for each character, because each one of their personal stories is so ripe for exploration and expansion. However, since I'm dealing with a finite amount of space to tell MGS2, I can't really compose in-depth bios on everybody. The #0 issue will take care of a lot of that.

But I will say that throughout Sons of Liberty, I worked very hard to augment each of the characters' personal stories as much as possible, such as Raiden's forgotten past as a child soldier in Liberia, Solidus's time as President of the United States, and even Fatman's dysfunctional days growing up among rival child prodigies. There's much more, but those are just a few examples.

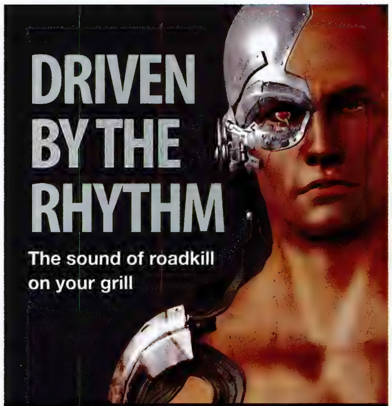
As a bonus, I'll also be showing obscure, never-seen-before characters, such as the two deceased members of Dead Cell, of whom I'm sure the hardcore fans will already know. And maybe, just maybe, I'll even find a way to work an MGS3 character into the storyline just to nicely bridge the two games…

> "…I know he's who fans of Metal Gear want to see more of. Snake is Metal Gear Solid, pure and simple."

Will we see anything that bridges the gap between MGS and MGS2?
You'll see bits and pieces in flashback sequences, but not a huge amount. You learn that Otacon and Snake formed Philanthropy to fix the worldwide arms race crisis that Ocelot created with his selling of Metal Gear technology to the black market. As for the rest, I don't want to give away too much. Yet.

Did Mr. Kojima or Konami have any feedback for IDW on the original series, and if so, how has that influenced the creation of Sons of Liberty?
I actually just met with Hideo Kojima again recently and he really goes out of his way to encourage us to try new things with the Metal Gear series, so he's been nothing but supportive. But, while he encourages experimentation, I fully respect the world he's created and will always try not to stray from the overall continuity of the series. So, you can rest assured knowing I won't be introducing any characters like Gaseous Snake anytime soon. Thankfully. **play**

Alex Garner writer **Metal Gear Solid: Sons of Liberty**



DRIVEN BY THE RHYTHM

The sound of roadkill on your grill

Interview Richard Dekkard
aka Orphic Rez,
composer and sound
effect artist, **Auto Assault**

by Mike Griffin

play: Any notable gigs as a professional in the music industry?
Richard Dekkard: The big one would have to be Dido. I was working with her brother, Rollo—his band is Faithless… Anyway, I was looking for a vocalist to work with for some demos, and he remarked about how his little sister was available. So she and I did about four songs together, they appeared on her first album, and basically she took off from there...

Who is your favorite musician?
I think the number-one music-maker in the world right now is Simon Posford. He records under the name Shpongle. What he does is really clever: he mixes ambient sound tempo with high-energy trance stuff.

Are you a gamer?
Absolutely. I've been a gamer for a long time. One of my earliest childhood memories was my father waiting in line to get me a Coleco[vision] for Christmas.

Favorite 8-bit era tunes?
Mario, for sure, and also Pac Man. Those were the simple melodies you could hum over and over in your head. The Mario stuff especially: it's just embedded in your brain and it *worked*.

What's your personal studio set-up?
It's a lot smaller than it used to be: you literally had synthesizers piled to the ceiling. Now it's 99 percent inside the computer, which is really nice. I use a Mac G5 with Logic Pro software for the majority of the stuff.

Your music in Auto Assault is big, layered electronica. Do you prefer this to orchestral composing?
Orchestral kind of scares me, because I'm not real experienced with it. Then again, my lack of experience has often been an advantage. What happens is: people expect you to do things the *right way*. But I think as long as you're doing something *good*, it doesn't matter how you do it. So I actually look forward to writing orchestral at some point, but I will almost certainly be doing it wrong [laughs].

> "...I think as long as you're doing something good, it doesn't matter how you do it."
>
> **Richard Dekkard** composer, sound effect artist **Auto Assault**

Unlike most musicians, as a gamer, when you look at a 3D environment…you probably have a good idea of what a player would feel inside that world, right?
One of the things that made me want to work on Auto Assault, and games in general, is that it's a much broader canvas. Working on film or records, it's very two-dimensional in the sense that you don't have an environment you interact with, or you don't have any environment at all besides the person's ears. A game lets me paint with sound inside a game world, and that's amazing.

Considering your background, how come you're also doing the sound effects in AA?
One of the unique characteristics that my records have was the extensive use of sound effects and non-musical noise to create drama. So it was a pretty natural extension to move that into the context of a game. It was certainly an unknown, I won't kid you, but it became apparent that it was a natural fit. The one thing I told NetDevil when they hired me is that it was a good thing they weren't doing a fantasy game with like, toadstools and fairies. Guns and cars, though? I'm there. **play**

Jade Empire OST

Sumthing Else
Available Now

JADE EMPIRE
ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK
BIOWARE
Microsoft

Composer Jack Wall took it upon himself to meld traditional Chinese percussion sounds with sweeping symphonic passages in Jade Empire, resulting in the ideal accompaniment for another BioWare masterwork.

Advent Rising OST

Sumthing Else
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ADVENT
RISING

Advent Rising was an epic, if slightly flawed experience, and its huge orchestral soundtrack almost stole the show. This is probably the best music that Tommy Tallarico has ever recorded.

Music Maker 10 Deluxe

Magix AG
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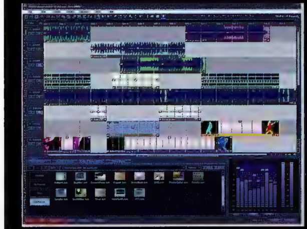

Getting into music creation is rarely as affordable as Music Maker 10 Deluxe. The 10th anniversary edition introduces a new ringtone maker, new drum sounds and improved live recording.

Music Studio 10 Deluxe

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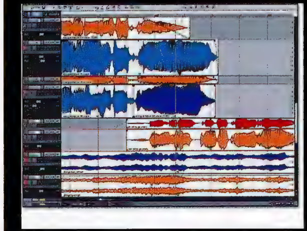

If you require more synthesizers, ReWire support and unlimited Midi tracks, Music Studio 10 Deluxe may suit your needs. Virtually every major sound format is supported, and arrangement options run deep.

BACK OF THE BOOK

09_05 ASHLEY "VEELA" ESQUEDA
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

This one goes out to all the ladies…

"Do you have a sister?"
"Do you know how rare you are?"
"How can I make my girlfriend like games?"

These are all things I've been asked over the years when I reveal that I'm a gamer. Over a period of time, I couldn't help but start to wonder… *Why aren't there more female gamers? Wasn't everyone expecting girls to really get into gaming when it hit the mainstream? I'd wager that we use cell phones, Sidekicks, instant messaging, MySpace, and other technological goodies more than guys do…so what's the deal?*

While the demographic continues to grow, I highly doubt it's gotten anywhere past the 15 percent mark (and I'm being really generous). We just don't make up much of the gaming community, and I had to ponder why we just weren't at the level that guys were. Were those non-gamer girls doing other stuff? Research says we use technology pretty equally with guys when you take gaming out of the equation (I still say girls use more), so why aren't most girls booting up their brother's/boyfriend's/dad's console in the living room? I thought long and hard about this, and came up with some theories as to why we're not on par with guys. Publishers, developers…listen up, because this is an inside look on how to get a piece of that golden "female non-gamer" demo you want to capture (and you might actually make them lifelong gamers!). Guy gamers, read up and you might get a little insight as to how your lady might get into gaming.

1. Girls Love a Good Story: It's no secret that girls tend to gravitate towards RPGs and adventure games. Why? Because we love drama. Yep, I said it. Chicks can be drama queens sometimes, and we love a game that makes us laugh/cry/rage/beam with pride. Give us an original, gripping story…and we're hooked. Everyone loves to care about great characters with real emotions and flaws, because they're so like us. Don't get me wrong; we love a good virtual killing spree every now and then…but the stories are what draw us in. I'll take one Rare game every five years as opposed to a hundred EA games in one year, and most female gamers will agree with me.

2. Girls Like Fantasy: How many girls have you met that have raved about Splinter Cell's realistic stealth combat tactics or the awesome way that Kasumi's knees and armpits are rendered in DOA Xtreme Volleyball? I'm guessing not too many. They're busy raving about Psychonauts' mind-bending worlds of the human (and lungfish) psyche. Most ladies will choose Tim Schafer's masterpiece…not because it's "cute" (although sometimes this is the case), but because it's imaginative. We love new and exciting things, and fantasy in a game brings out that inquisitive nature. I bet that if a guy played Psychonauts, a girl would ask questions when she saw the screen…where she could easily walk past a Halo or a Ghost Recon without a second thought.

3. Big Boobs Make Us Feel Inadequate: I know that's pretty succinct, but I'll elaborate anyway, because someone's got to say it. Sure, we appreciate the female form (don't forget we like art and pretty things), but does that new heroine need to be a 36DDD? Probably not. Having to watch Tina jump up and down in DOA3 only makes us feel like crap. We're sensitive by nature, and there's already enough media pressure on girls to look perfect through fashion, film and television. We don't mind if they're big (we do remember that guys are the majority!), but contrary to popular belief, there is such a thing as too big, even for guys. Yes, I'm sure you're saying to yourself, "But she just said girls prefer fantasy over realism!" Well, you're right. This is one of those "exception to the rule" things. I'm sure there's a compromise that can be reached.

> "Publishers, developers… listen up, because this is an inside look on how to get a piece of that golden 'female non-gamer' demo you want to capture…"

4. We Want to Have Fun: Cyndi Lauper said it best…"Girls just want to have fun." Guys tend to look at gaming as a competition (high scores, beat times, record number of kills in a deathmatch), while girls just want to have a good time. There should be less focus on competition…there's already enough animosity between guys. Of course, it's great to brag about beating Halo on Legendary all by yourself, but we just want to have a great time and shoot some Covenant. We've all got feathers in our cap that we show off, but maybe if a few guys out there didn't pick on their girlfriends while playing multiplayer Halo, we'd be more inclined to share the field of battle with guys. I know it's crazy to even suggest it, but most girls are actually intimidated by your group of shouting, win-crazy friends (maybe that's why she won't watch football with you either…). Sometimes, girls have to actually learn how to play a game; they're not born with that instinctual controller know-how.

Disclaimer. These theories may not apply to any number of guys and/or girls…and for the most part, when I say "girls," I tend to mean girls that *don't* already love video gaming…we're a whole different breed.

There's more to it than just these four principle theories, I'm sure, but that's what I came up with. I think there are a lot of girls that need the right game to interest them. There are others that need the right person to introduce them to gaming, and still others that need the right combo of everything to suck them into games. Let's hope that developers and producers read this and realize that they can grab those female gamers…they're just going to need a lot more than GTA and 50 Cent: Bulletproof to do it with.

⬆ 1350 AD
Kettle Helmet popularized in Europe.

1780 AD
La Boessiere invents fencing mask.

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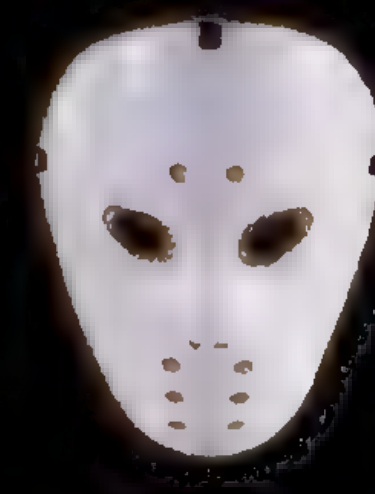

1960 AD

Goalie mask developed.

⬆ 2005 AD

Pelican gets in the game.

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My name is, Reith...
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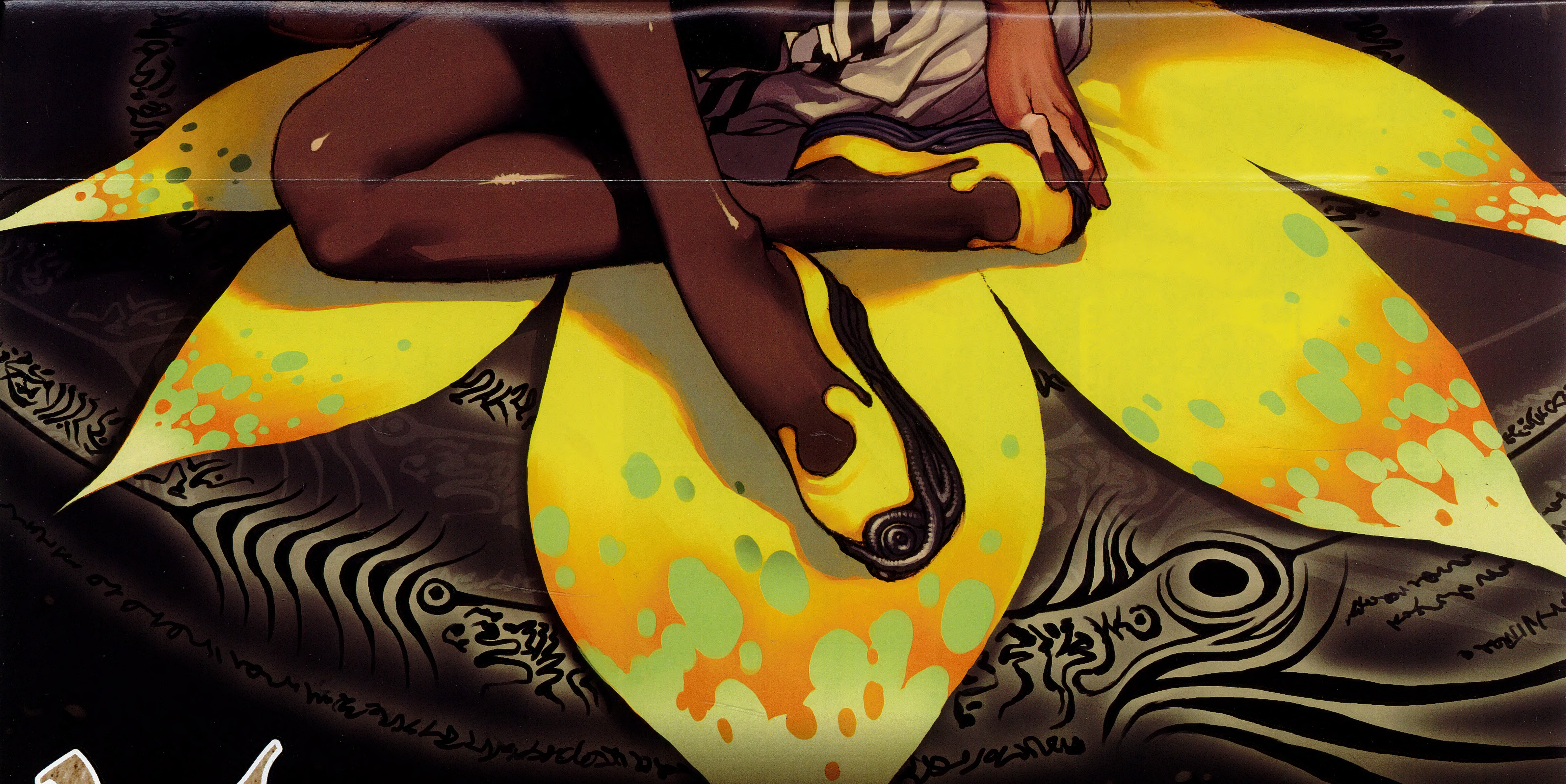

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